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THE HOPEFUL JOURNEY

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THE HOPEFUL JOURNEY

BY

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

JUDITH	PAGE I
------------------	-----------

BOOK II

EVE	81
---------------	----

BOOK III

EVE AND FRANK	118
-------------------------	-----

BOOK IV

MONICA	178
------------------	-----

BOOK V

MONICA AND SHANE	239
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TO BILLEE

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. . . . for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (*El Dorado*).

THE HOPEFUL JOURNEY

BOOK I

JUDITH

CHAPTER ONE

IT was the proud boast of the Sacheverell Bentleys that since the last days of the seventeenth century their family had given at least one son in every generation to the Church. The habit seems to have grown from the ordination, towards the close of the century, of that Sacheverell Bentley who had first seen the light in the year of our Lord sixteen-seventy-eight—an event which in the opinion of all the Bentleys that followed him would alone have made the year auspicious without the assistance of Titus Oates or the passing of Habeas Corpus.

Jeremy Sacheverell Bentley, a gentleman of decided opinions and some courage, had preached with considerable vigour against dissenters and their Whig supporters, for which he was subsequently impeached, and even more vigorously against women, for which, later, Queen Anne seems to have rewarded him with a living in Holborn, where he eventually married a wife who was strong-minded enough to persuade him to give both dissenters and women a rest, and tactful enough to produce a family of the right sex.

From one twig of this branch of the family tree was descended another Sacheverell Bentley, who took orders in the year of Waterloo, achieved one of the few livings in Essex

which boasted a parsonage not exposed to the "pestilential air of the marshes" and married a woman who brought him a dowry as handsome as her face, bestowed upon him much wifely care and devotion and expired six years later in the effort of producing the only child of the marriage.

To the memory of this lady Sacheverell remained sternly faithful. He never took another wife, and rumour seems to have ignored him in the matter of equivalents. His small son he christened Jeremy, intended him from his cradle for the Church, and hoped from him those tremendous things which are expected from only sons—as though it is their heavy destiny to perform, *solus*, what a family of sons could hardly have achieved between them.

From the first Jeremy's heavy destiny does not seem to have appealed to him, and the Essex parsonage must have shuddered early and long with the shock of conflict and discord. There could scarcely have been a time when it was not evident that whatever else young Jeremy had inherited from Queen Anne's beneficiary it was neither his feeling for the Church nor his dislike of women. He was still at school when he decided that he wanted not to preach but to farm, and it was during the interregnum which, with the ending of school, followed the clash of wills in this matter, that Sacheverell perceived how well-advised he would be to find some occupation for idle hands. He thereupon ceased his attempts to persuade his son to go up to Oxford, packed him off to follow his bent in a neighbouring county and set himself to clear up the scandal he had left behind on the very doorstep of the Parsonage itself.

The two years that followed produced nothing more troublesome than some long bills, occasional indications that Jeremy was badly bitten by the steam craze and continual lamentations that he had neither the money for his whims nor a farm of his own upon which to put them to the test. Sacheverell paid the bills, sympathised with the schemes he yet refused to capitalise, and behaved with his usual promptitude when young Jeremy showed signs of leaving him with yet another mess to clear up—none the more inviting, he found,

for being on somebody else's doorstep. Sacheverell, like every other man of his age, believed that male youth must sow its wild oats; but he may be pardoned perhaps for wishing that Jeremy would contrive to sow his with a little less éclat.

However, young Jeremy avoided the reaping of this particular crop by being hauled off to Clutton, where, three years later, at the age of twenty-four (and apparently as reward for having ostensibly forgotten the existence of women) he received a definite allowance from his father, took a farm on a long lease and proceeded to put some of his schemes into practice. An unwonted peace settled down belatedly upon the Essex parsonage, until, two years later, Jeremy wrote that he was about to be married, volunteering the information that the girl was seventeen, an orphan and but newly arrived in Clutton under the guardianship of two maiden ladies, her aunts. These facts notwithstanding, Sacheverell gloomily anticipated the worst until he came to Clutton and saw little Judith Dale for himself, when his relief was so tremendous that he admitted her at once, and permanently, to a snug corner in his heart. She was everything, he said, that he could have wished, and believing that marriage was indeed instituted "for such as have not the gift of continence," revealed an almost indecent haste to get Jeremy safely married. Those tiresome old women, Judith's aunts, however, oblivious to the fact that here was a soul to be saved, insisted sternly that no marriage should take place until their niece was eighteen. But eighteen at last she was: the old ladies were held to their promise and Sacheverell, who had never before seen his son "in love" and was in danger of inferring too much from it, recklessly increased his allowance and insisted upon coming over to Clutton for the ceremony.

It took place on a fine October morning in the year eighteen-fifty-three—an adventurous year, not alone for Judith Dale, to whom nothing of any importance whatsoever had happened until her meeting, eleven months ago, with Jeremy Bentley; a year, like any other, of disease and strikes; of novelty and invention; of spiritualism and uncomfortable railway travelling; of aeronautics and prophecies; of feminism and anti-feminism, though they must then have called it "Bloomerism."

Charlotte Bronte had produced her last story, and unperturbed by the storm of abuse which had descended upon her recent *Letters* to her friend, Mr. Atkinson, Harriet Martineau was writing her social and political articles for the *Daily News*. England, just emerging from the Hungry Forties, had not yet reached the complacent sixties; was, indeed, separated from them by all the "frightfulness" of the Crimea, scarcely guessed at, here in October, eighteen-fifty-three, though the Tsar's army was in Moldavia and the British and French fleets rode already up the Dardanelles.

Jeremy, at the time of his marriage, was twenty-seven and looked older. "Handsome" was the epithet most commonly applied to him, but though he was tall and well built, dark, flashing and roving of eye, it was a description to which his somewhat untidy features scarcely entitled him. In an age of whiskers he attracted attention by cultivating only a diminutive moustache, and though usually careless of his clothes he seems upon this auspicious day to have risen amply to the occasion, and to the rather exuberant morning clothes of the period added the high, wide collar and tall, narrow hat that an age which has evolved the "bowler" probably thinks ridiculous.

Judith, who would not have agreed that Jeremy was not entitled to the epithet "handsome," nor with our superior generation that his tall, narrow hat was ridiculous, was barely eighteen. Save at Jeremy's side she gave the impression of height and remained obstinately slim despite the tendency of the feminine attire of the day to advance laterally. Not that on this October morning Judith's gown revealed the worst excesses of the crinoline, which, in their ultimate horror, had not yet burst upon a bewildered but censorious world. Judith belonged not to the metropolis, but to the country, and was therefore in so little danger of aiding and abetting Dame Fashion in her frantic efforts after feminine isolation that throughout the reign of the crinoline it remained blissfully possible to shake hands comfortably with Judith, unbalked by a phalanx of flounces. Not—after this one triumphant day—that there could have been very many people who came wanting to shake Judith Bentley by the hand.

Little Judith Dale, as she was then, tall, slim and grave-eyed, was as ill-served by the epithet "pretty" as was Jeremy by the more dignified description of "handsome." At no time did brilliance in any sense whatever belong to Judith Dale. The miniature painted by John Chalon, R.A., in the spring of the year that followed her marriage, stresses the fact that she was quiet—of colouring as of expression, with a palely tinted skin and grey eyes that looked at you from straight dark brows and knew so obviously no tricks at all. Her beauty, even at eighteen, was less a thing of complexion and features than of something else that lay just beyond, that bothered you because you could not give it a name, because it escaped you as that kind of charm always does and probably always will.

It is at least doubtful, however, whether it ever bothered Jeremy Bentley. Judith's neat features, her youthful figure and wavering colour, the dark wavy mass of her hair, which even the fashions of the time could not disfigure and which was excellently served that day by the tiny bonnet she wore towards the back of her head, were things Jeremy was scarcely likely to have looked beyond. Had they been less obvious he might possibly have looked at her differently, so that he saw at least a little way beyond them, though it is much more probable that, being Jeremy, he would not, then, have looked at her at all. Beyond doubt, however, he was intrigued by that faint air which seems to have clung about her, compounded of youth and ignorance with something, too, of that shyness which so frequently accompanies a warm impulsive nature—as if always it must be on guard against itself. Judith—and you catch a hint of it in that miniature of Chalon's—looked cold and remote and was neither; and as though Jeremy was aware of it, you might have caught him looking at her, in those early days of his wooing, as if he knew how pleasant it was going to be to break through that faint barrier of reserve. For Jeremy was not the man to admire boldness in a woman, certainly not in a wife, and Judith's starlike beauty—aloof, unstressed—must have drawn him as surely as the cold moon the sea.

Moreover, Jeremy was inclined to think that he had waited unnecessarily long for possession (it was the word he would have

used), though it was less than a year, all told. Unused to waiting for what he wanted, he cherished a grudge against "those two old tabbies" in the front pew (Judith's aunts) who steadily, unwaveringly, for eleven whole months had said him nay. He had of them this morning an impatient uncomfortable sense, weeping decorously but unmistakably behind their veils throughout the ceremony, as though even now they considered he should have waited longer, as though even at eighteen they thought their niece "too young to be married." But for all his impatience Jeremy was conscious of something reassuringly definite about this ceremony, and was not unwilling that the parishioners of Clutton should realise that it took two clergymen to marry a Bentley, even a Bentley who had descended to farming. For though he had turned his back upon the Church of his fathers, Jeremy regarded it still as an excellent adjuster of the social scale. Jeremy was a snob. He believed in the well-born, the well-dressed and the well-fed. As son of a family who had always had just that sufficiency of this world's goods which carries with it an exaggerated respect for property, perhaps that was inevitable. Born in the very middle of that unhappy time which followed the close of the Napoleonic wars, and six years before the passing of the Reform Bill in eighteen-thirty-two, his childhood must have been full of the clamour of the events which immediately preceded his birth: the escape of Napoleon from Elba; the Lancashire and Yorkshire machinery riots, the bloodshed at Peterloo; and his most impressionable years must have echoed with the bitter cry of rags and misery. For these days of Jeremy's childhood were the good old days when a boy was flogged for accidentally killing a leveret, a starving woman tried for the crime of stealing a faggot worth a penny; when meat was so much a luxury that children were fed on potatoes and salt; when bread was tenpence a loaf and a noble duke was suggesting that the poor should eke out their meagre fare by the use of curry powder. Yet because the rigours of the Hungry Forties did not touch young Jeremy Bentley, it would be a mistake to say they had no effect upon him; they served the excellent purpose of inuring him early and unalterably to the inequalities

of the social system under which he lived. By the time he had attained the age of twenty-one he had also attained to the satisfactory belief that the Mines and Factories Acts which Sir Robert Peel's Government had just passed had done all that was humanly possible for the labouring classes. He thought the Iron Duke spoke soundest common sense when he said that England was the only country in which the poor man, if but sober and industrious, could be sure of a competency, and to the end of his long life he believed it.

And at the time of his marriage his ideas were set rigidly, as in a mould. There is no sort of evidence that he ever changed an opinion or a point of view. Even at twenty-seven he was hard and impercipient : certain of his own place in the scheme of things and of that of other people. He despised women, so far as their minds were concerned, but was never entirely able to deliver himself from the tyranny of their bodies. That he required them to be beautiful is but another way of saying the same thing.

He had never wanted anything quite so much as he wanted Judith. She must, then, have been as beautiful as all that. That he thought her beautiful that morning in October, fifty-three, is certain, as, too, is the fact that for all his wedding pageantry ministered to his vanity he seems to have ended by finding fault with it. A mighty tedious affair, he called it later, which seemed to mean that it had stood most tantalisingly between him and that moment when he could drive off alone with Judith, no man saying him nay (and no woman !—curse those old tabbies who had kept him waiting a year !) For on this morning Jeremy Bentley's healthy passions must have risen greedily at the sight of Judith standing there at his side in her rapturous shyness and satin no whiter than her face.

But Judith—with no passions at all as yet, with only that vague misted sense she had of "love" and marriage—was happy. She was proud of her tall dark lover, her little head full of romantic ideas about him and about marriage, which must that morning have seemed indeed the sacrament she had been taught to believe it, a thing at once amazing and awful,

the common but the highest fate of women, and one for which they were made. Certainly this morning, for all her adorable shyness and the pale ghost of apprehension that came riding up through the haze of her maiden ignorance, she would not have drawn back if she could. The sweetest incense ever swung beneath the nostrils of egotistic mankind must have swung that morning, all those years ago, below little Judith Dale's—the knowledge that she was being not only admired, but envied. For who would not have married “handsome young Mr. Bentley” if the opportunity had arisen? All youthful unappropriated feminine eyes turned naturally to Clunbury Hall, where this gay young man kept bachelor state, tilled his land, experimented with his extraordinary engines, sent his cattle to Clunbury market and rode blithely to hounds with the Beaufort Chase. But Judith's arrival eighteen months ago in Clutton had settled the fate of all those others in whose direction—not, rumour whispered, altogether without encouragement—Jeremy's darkly flashing eye had roved; for having alighted upon Judith the roving eye ceased roving. Handsome young Mr. Bentley was “smitten” and all feminine Clutton and Clunbury retired from the contest, though not without the satisfaction of declaring with that obtuseness half-real, half-feigned, of which only women (and at such times) are capable that they really could not discover what Mr. Bentley could see in the chit. . . .

But from the first Jeremy seems to have seen thus far at least beyond Judith's beauty—he who was not given to looking beyond such a thing in woman. He saw that she was gentle and non-assertive and he believed her to be completely untouched (“unspoiled”) by the new-fangled notions women were beginning to get hold of. Jeremy did not approve of Miss Martineau or of her friend Miss Brontë, and would indeed have been surprised to hear that Judith's young bosom cherished heaven knows what romantic longings born of her reading of *Jane Eyre*; what longings of another kind—vague but disturbing—had been induced by *Shirley*. Even the kind aunts had been a little disconcerted by this affection she displayed for so doubtful an author, harking her back gently to Mrs.

Oliphant, who came to them regularly between the respectable covers of *Blackwood*; to Mrs. Gaskell, whose *Cranford* was appearing just then in Mr. Dickens's new weekly, and to the great Mr. Dickens himself. But Judith's affection for *Jane* and for *Shirley* never flagged. She had no gift of literary criticism, so it could not have been there that Charlotte got at her. It almost looks as if, as early as all this, she derived something from Charlotte she got nowhere else; something stimulating, reassuring; as if Charlotte touched some answering chord none of the rest could reach. Not even Mrs. Browning, with her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. . . .

Here, surely, if we were looking for it, was the first hint of the rebel. Yet who that knew her ever dreamed of calling Judith Bentley a rebel? Not Jeremy, who never even dreamed of looking for so much as that first hint. To the end Judith remained to him what she was—what he thought she was—that day he married her, save that she lost her beauty, which inclined him to think her even stupider than he might otherwise have done. That, perhaps, was one reason why, later, she bored and irritated him; but there was another. The development of that faint hint of rebellion might have done something to save her, for Jeremy liked his slaves to wriggle. But Judith never wriggled, and beneath that quiet exterior, that little air of aloofness, she must have learned to hide many things.

It was another Judith, some sixty-five years later, who crystallised the reason of this marriage which all feminine Clutton professed to find "beyond" it. She knew, quite definitely, this second Judith, why Grandfather Bentley had married Grandmother Bentley. Grandfather Bentley (whom this other Judith did not love, but whom, on the other hand, she did not hate, being a level-headed young "modern" and bent upon being strictly fair to all and everything) was like Mr. Tulliver—he had married his wife because she was "weak like." Not that Grandmamma Bentley had been as weak as Mrs. Tulliver, but she was weak in Jeremy's hands, which came perhaps to the same thing. "Malleable material, darlings, that's what old Jeremy Bentley was after—something soft he

could write his name on." Certainly there was nothing malleable about Jeremy's granddaughter, who spoke with the passionate sincerity of the very young and the cold incisiveness which seemed to suggest that she found the mental picture of Grandfather Bentley writing his name through all those years upon her grandmother, an outrageous one.

But on that sunny October morning in eighteen-fifty-three, little Judith Dale knew nothing of Jeremy's propensities towards self-assertion ; nothing of anything, in fact, save that Jeremy adored her and she adored him.

Two months later, with her new world swaying perilously around her, she realised that neither of these things was true. Jeremy did not "adore" her, and, worse, she did not "adore" Jeremy. Yet if there was anything Judith Dale ever wanted in this world it was to be extravagantly loved. She remembered neither of her parents, and the calm correct affection that her aunts had given her (so undemonstrative, save on her wedding-day, when it caused them to weep so dismally down her neck) did not satisfy the passionate craving of her young heart to be adored. Extravagantly and unendingly loved she once was (though not by Jeremy), but by then, perhaps, she had ceased to want it so much or had learned to do without it. "She doesn't even notice," said the someone who had spilled all that extravagant affection at her feet. . . . "She doesn't care." But she cared in those early days, where Jeremy was concerned. That was certain. She cared so much that he might, then, have written his name all over her with impunity if only he had had the sense to love her while he did it !

Doubtful if that second Judith—child of a rebellious age, frank, sturdy, unafraid and hard—ever quite realised that, or if it would have made any difference if she had. No amount of "love," in her estimation, would have made up for the abomination you were guilty of in stamping yourself upon another human being. But, at least, she realised that Jeremy Bentley had not been altogether successful, for all he had chosen his material so carefully. Some satisfaction to know that the best part of Grandmamma Bentley had been glass to his pencil ; that separate, withdrawn, it remained for ever just

beyond his reach. But Jeremy never knew. Never did it occur to him that some little bit of Judith had escaped him—that never once, after those first two months, had he held quite the whole of her in his arms.

Things like that never did occur to Jeremy Bentley.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN Judith stopped seeing herself as a beautified Jane Eyre and Jeremy as a handsome edition of Rochester, life must surely have looked to her very much like a straight, dull road with no end in sight and no side shows. She was such a child, it is impossible not to believe that the side shows would have appealed to her enormously.

It isn't easy, all these years later, to see just exactly where that sudden ending of romance had landed Judith Bentley. If, as Judith Dale, she had ever thought much about marriage, it must have been in the terms of an exchange. Instead of the dull, prim life with her aunts, there would be a roseate existence with Jeremy at Clunbury Hall, which wasn't really a hall at all (nor called so until Jeremy became its tenant), but just a rambling old house of some ten or twelve rooms with great-paned windows all looking across several acres of well-tilled ground to Solbury Hill and the blue downs. That exchange does seem to have been the kind of thing that was in Judith's mind when first she wore Jeremy's ring and her friends came brushing away the surprising memory of his kisses with their own, which yet, by comparison, were scarcely kisses at all.

Judith lived in a less introspective age than ours, and it is improbable that she went very far back over the ground of her emotions from that day when she stopped seeing Jeremy as Mr. Rochester and herself as Jane. Yet if ever she looked even as far back as those first surprising embraces of Jeremy's it must have been clear to her (for she was an honest person) that they did not square at all with this mood marriage had induced in her. There were things in marriage which revolted

and disgusted her, things for which nothing and no one had prepared her, though she would have died rather than have spoken of them. But certainly Jeremy's kisses had been things apart—manifestations of his affection, the pledge he gave her that now and for the first time she was really loved—so that if they had bewildered her they had also thrilled and delighted her; but here, two months after marriage, they did that no longer.

None the less, she accepted what they had told her of marriage. The common fate. . . . She admitted that. But the highest? Almost she admitted that, too, because it was plain there was nothing else for women, and she knew that she could not have borne, year in, year out, to have lived the lives of her kind old aunts. Just their books (which did not include the thrilling Miss Brontë, whose knowledge was suspect), their needlework, their garden, their little round of friends. . . . Forty and forty-five . . . the old maids of Cedars Cottage. Judith was convinced that life ought, somehow, to be more than that, else it were meaningless indeed. Not for years did she lose that belief of hers that life really had a meaning; that if you went on long enough and hopefully enough, you were bound to come to it. Somewhere deep down within her that belief burnt steadily, like a flame.

Perhaps here at eighteen, in the face of this catastrophic discovery that Jeremy did not adore her and that she did not adore him, the flame flickered a little, but it never went out. It survived the horrible realisation that Jeremy the man in possession was a very different person from Jeremy the man who came a-wooing. Jeremy couldn't have taken much pains: his methods must have shown little *finesse*: he let her see so clearly—and so early—that there was so very much of him, so very little of her, by comparison; made her feel that what there was would be as clay in his hands. Perhaps, too, he let her see too soon and too frequently that he valued nothing about her but her prettiness, her palely-tinted "magnolia" face (as the young reporter on the Clutton and Clunbury *Herald* had called it in his note on her wedding), the clear eyes, the gentle curving of the slim body of youth; that what mind she

had he despised, revealing the fact in the way he disposed of her gently-expressed opinions and held her up to the good-natured ridicule of his hunting friends. When, on these occasions, the rare colour would come flooding her face, the tears swim into her grey eyes, he would drag her on to his knee, turn up her exquisite chin with a quick movement of his hand and close his mouth firm and hard upon hers.

Was it the first time he did that, the first time she ever heard that chorus of good-humoured laughter at her expense, the first time he kissed her like that, "in public," as she said, that she realised how absurd her dreams had been? Did she in that one brief moment see all things clearly? Did that kiss, so lightly and (as it seemed to her) so shamelessly given, reveal to her not only Jeremy, but herself? So much of him, so little of her. . . . His kisses seemed to swallow her up. She grew afraid of him, and worse, she realised that she always had been afraid of him . . . that across all the tremulous flattery of those ardent days of his wooing, fear had dragged a muddy trail. It couldn't have been an inspiring realisation.

Perhaps she was really as stupid as he thought her—as he thought all women. Perhaps not. But at least she saw what Jeremy wanted of her—you might say she could not very well have missed it—sons, and a well-kept house. That was her business in life. Let her see that she kept to it.

It was so she learned to look away from Jeremy to marriage itself, to the things marriage had brought her—a home of her own, the little social duties of her position, the daily round of trivial tasks. They were not too satisfying: she had little personal vanity, even less small talk and no social ambitions whatever. She wanted something that these things no more than Jeremy had given her. She didn't know what it was, save that it must be something infinitely satisfying, as a nun, perhaps, found her religion, or as she herself had found the mere thought of love. That much at least emerges from the fumbling efforts of those first few months when she smuggled the *Daily News* into the house to read Miss Martineau, though the smuggling couldn't have been easy since Jeremy read the *Morning Post* and would have no radical newspapers cross his

threshold. Moreover, it is a trifle difficult to see what Judith could have got from Miss Martineau but a headache.

Yet whatever it was she missed in her new life, whatever it was she wanted, whatever she sought, she had the sense to keep it to herself. It was a trick she came by even as a child, as though the capacity for self-expression had been denied her, as though Fate, intelligently anticipating Jeremy, had made her life to that degree, at least, much smoother.

So, for those first few months, she must have pushed down her revulsions and disillusionings beneath a close-fitting lid of silence. In the solitude of her spirit her reserve must have clothed her about as a shroud: she must have drawn from herself something that made up for the absolute nothingness that marriage had given her. She looked no more at the "Portuguese" Sonnets which had somehow completely lost their meaning, but gradually, beneath that cloak of busyness, that little air of preoccupation with the trivial, her life stood still, anchored to the thought of motherhood. Jeremy's life now to her was a thing apart: since those early days when he had made it so clear that she was a woman and therefore could know nothing of the things of his world, she had resisted his occasional attempts to coax her into it that he might laugh at her. She couldn't be caught that way any longer: not by his boast that he was the third man in England to use Smith's system of steam cultivation, not by his lamentation that on the previous year's working he had made a dead loss, and not by his explanation, which put it not on to the Cultivator but on to the weather. Eighteen-fifty-three, which has come down to history as the "wet year," had been disastrous for farmers. All over the country crops had been ruined; the corn had sprouted in the ear: hay had been carried down the river. Eye Farm, upon which Jeremy had long turned an interested gaze, was flooded twice in six months: Clutton itself had not wholly escaped, and Jeremy's lamentations had alternated with his love-making. But Judith listened now with a colder heart to his prophecies of triumph in the autumn to come. Not for nothing had Jeremy mocked her initial efforts to acquire information. Something had dried up within her, so that she no longer cared

about Jeremy's experiments. Of the new method of cultivation she knew nothing, save that so far Jeremy had lost a good deal of money over it, and that she liked the look of the short hedgerowed fields of the other farmers better than she liked Jeremy's larger square ones that harboured a water tank in the corner. But Jeremy was no dealer in landscapes, in the picturesque, as once in the early days of his marriage he had taken occasion to inform her.

"A steam engine, madam, eats only when it works," he told her, and sold some more of his horses that were less considerate.

Jeremy was well content. He considered his marriage a success, which meant that he was not yet tired of Judith, that she was there when he wanted her: that she managed his house efficiently and saw that he had the meals he liked. In an excellent mood of well-being he went on with his work, sent his cattle to market, hunted and grew fat, so that people began to say that marriage agreed with him. But Judith did not hunt and was not encouraged by Jeremy to begin. Neither did she grow fat. Pale, slim, shadow-eyed, she moved about the big rooms of Clunbury Hall, looked after her house, managed her servants and made friends of Jeremy's dogs. Loneliness lived with her like a familiar spirit; touched her with cold hands, scared her at times into believing that nothing, simply nothing, moved towards her down the long road of the future, nor ever would. She had been married rather less than four months, but already she was obsessed with the thought that she wasn't going to have any children. And whilst, with the deepening of the rumours of war, Jeremy was talking bitterly of Lord Aberdeen as a pro-Russian, declaring that the Manchester pacifists ought to be shot and pouring scorn upon the people who talked as though England was "coming in" against France, the fear clutched at Judith's heart with a horrid persistence. She grew sick with it, seeing life with Jeremy, his steam-ploughs and his politics, as an appalling affair, a riddle to which there could never be any answer.

It was at the close of March, soon after England's declaration of war against Russia, when the British and French fleets rode

on up the Dardanelles and Jeremy was achieving some reputation as a prophet, that Judith began to suspect that after all she need not have worried. And whilst Jeremy voiced his annoyance that the people of Clutton should be so lukewarm about the war, she sat happily down to a quiet reading of *The Newcomes*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and of *Punch* (now that it had come in upon the side of the war cabinet, and Jeremy, in spite of its radical sympathies, would permit it once again to cross his threshold).

But her absorption in these things of print irritated Jeremy almost beyond bearing.

"I suppose you, madam," he said to her once, "don't find the war interesting enough? Mr. Thackeray, perhaps, is more thrilling?"

She had flushed at his tone, but had risked his scorn sufficiently to shake her head. Not *interesting*. No . . . surely that was the wrong word? But Jeremy was not minded to stay to hear what she considered the right word. After all, what had women to do with war? War was a man's job. Men made the wars and men fought them. Just as well, perhaps, that women on the subject should remain silent.

Judith, at least, remained silent, hugging her new-born hope. And then, by the middle of April, when the British and French fleets were bombarding Odessa, the hope grew to a certainty. She stopped fumbling after her happiness, was content to sit there waiting for it. Useless to talk, then, to Judith of the war. Her thoughts were not on death at all, but on life. Even Jeremy saw that and left her alone.

And Jeremy was pleased at her news, so pleased that when in the May he suggested taking her up to town with him she had not the heart to refuse him, though she wanted nothing so much as to stay quietly where she was, hugging her unbelievable happiness. So to town they went, where they stayed longer than they had intended, tempted by the opening of the Crystal Palace at the beginning of June, to which function they drove out in state from their hotel in the Strand. They went to Baker Street and had a look at Madame Tussaud's wax figures: to Covent Garden to hear Verdi (though Jeremy protested,

with some truth, that you could hear him for nothing in the London streets) and out to Camden Hill for those sittings in John Chalon's studio. . . . A sudden whim of Jeremy's, those visits, only to be explained by his satisfaction at Judith's prospective motherhood or, rather, in his own prospective fatherhood (for that was really how he thought of the matter). And more, too, than that : there was the fierce insistent pricking of the pride of possession, for here in June, eighteen-fifty-four, when there was a special reason for the happy light in her grey eyes, for the grave content which turned up the corners of her adorable mouth, Judith must have been looking very lovely—and Jeremy was not the sort of man to miss a fact of that sort. Then, at least, the miniature must have seemed to Jeremy worth the price he paid for it.

That expedition to the metropolis was never repeated. Those three weeks were an experience Jeremy never cared to repeat ; as though he never again had quite the same reason to do anything so impulsive. Or perhaps he forgot his pride in the Judith who sat flushed and thrilled at his side as they drove through the London streets, in the annoyance he felt at the Judith who fell ill immediately upon her return. Certainly he did not attempt to hide his annoyance with the tiresome aunts, who, believing that a pregnant woman is an invalid and should go nowhere and do nothing, came upbraiding him that he should have had no better sense than to take his wife "gallivanting" at such a time. They meant well, poor dears, were, indeed, genuinely disturbed ; but for all that they broke up between them that little patch of serenity in which for the past month Judith had sat, like a little cat, and sunned herself.

Presently, when she was better again and the tiresome aunts had left Jeremy master, as he put it, of his own house, summer was at its last gasp. September came, bringing with it the news of the allied landing in the Crimea, and of the heights of Alma stormed and taken. The harvest that year, as Jeremy had anticipated, had been excellent ; his crops were the best in the neighbourhood and he more than recouped himself for his losses of the previous year by selling his wheat at eighty shillings

a quarter. War or no war, Jeremy had little to complain of. He had justified himself : in his own eyes and in those of his neighbours ; his turnover was highly satisfactory and his wife was about to give him a son.

As for Judith herself, her rose-tinted memories of happy days, her pain-edged memories of their aftermath, faded away into the clouds of war. And though she clutched desperately at some thread of quiet at the back of things, within herself, without and about there was no quiet at all. Day by day the tide of excitement which followed upon the victory of the Alma, the even stronger tide of indignation which followed the revelations of the condition of the wounded, rose higher and higher. Even to herself Judith must have felt very small and unimportant in those days when " Mrs. " Nightingale was being announced in *The Times* as having agreed to go out to Scutari. (" Agreed ! " said Jeremy scornfully, " as though the Government were on their knees beseeching her to go ! " as, indeed, it afterwards transpired they very nearly had been !) That the times were stirring, even Judith, with her silent reservations about war and her immersion in the facts of life rather than of death, would not have denied. No one who lived but must have felt some lift of the wave of enthusiasm which rose like a tide upon the revelation that Florence Nightingale was no middle-aged married woman, but young (though Jeremy sniffed a little at that) and popular. As eagerly as anybody else Judith read the newspaper accounts of Miss Nightingale's life and thrilled as keenly to the story published in *The Times* of the railway authorities at Boulogne refusing payment for the cartage of her boxes.

It was the last thing she remembered before a day and night of pain shut out the world and the war and all things. Later, with the knowledge that her child was a daughter came also a vague sense of Jeremy's disappointed face. For days she was too ill to care very much about either of these things ; but presently, when she realised how acute Jeremy's disappointment was, and when he said the baby was to be called Huldah, she wept. Not alone because she did not like the name, but because she had discovered in the Dictionary of

Names they brought her that it was derived from some German word which meant a weazel. And Jeremy, infinitely bored, had kissed her roughly, as though to indicate that he didn't really believe she had done it on purpose, before he left her and went out to celebrate the victory of Balaklava.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE record of Judith Bentley's life for the next few years is the record of the birth of her children and of very little beyond. There was really nothing else whatever that happened to her. And yet it was by no means the dull placid round of maternity that fell to the lot of other women ; there was much more in Judith's child-bearing than that. For steadily, year by year, with danger and difficulty, she continued to do the wrong thing, to present Jeremy with yet another girl in the place of the boy he coveted.

An orgy of motherhood—an orgy of girls. There was Mary, born in the December of the following year ; the twins, who came in the following November and departed in the New Year. What with the bombardment of Canton, during which they were born, and the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, in the first days of which they died, Jeremy seems scarcely to have noticed their brief existence. After the twins came Elizabeth, and after Elizabeth an interval of five years. Not quite five years of peace, perhaps, for Jeremy still wanted a son, but at least five years of rest. And at the end of them Judith's sixth daughter was born. For no particular reason she was christened Eve.

An orgy of girls . . . and the legend that Jeremy had been heard complaining, with the egregious Dombey, that there was " no issue " of his marriage. But at least everybody knew that at the birth of Huldah he had gone out and got very drunk, and that he had done the same when Mary arrived, though without the excuse of Balaklava. It was the only time Judith managed to miss the eve or aftermath of some important military event. There were so many of them just then that to miss one seemed

a really clever thing—the only clever thing, perhaps, that Judith ever did, unless it was producing that boy right at the end when nobody any longer expected it of her.

But during those ten years before Clive made his appearance a process of steady disillusionment, collateral with another of compensation, was going on in the life of Judith Bentley. Motherhood had, indeed, given her the something “satisfying” for which she had longed. And though Jeremy had destroyed her illusions, though the feeling she had for him as lover was dead, a new affection was born in her heart for him as the father of her children. At least he had given her those. . . . Had she lived in our more scientific, more humane century he might have given her fewer of them: Huldah and Mary might very well have been the beginning and the end of Judith Bentley’s motherhood and of Jeremy’s hopes of a son and heir. But here in the eighteen-fifties you were not let off because you achieved with pain and danger what other women did with no more than normal risk and discomfort. Not that Judith asked or wished to be let off. Perhaps motherhood meant more to her than to those women who suffered less for it. Certainly she wanted her babies. There was never any doubt about that. They were the only things that ever really belonged to her, and into them she poured her whole being. They had more than their share of her affection: their own and that which she would have lavished on Jeremy had he been what she dreamed: had he been able to “get” at her.

She would have been horrified if you had suggested it, but her children were opiates: they dulled and soothed instead of stimulating. They made up for the things she had missed, so that she gave them not only affection, but gratitude. But whatever vision she had of their forming a link between herself and Jeremy she must have abandoned after the arrival of Mary; must have seen that with a family of girls you got nowhere with Jeremy. . . .

“Mary,” he said. “A good name. Bitter. A bitter disappointment.”

In her heart Judith never forgave him for that, never from that time seems to have cared to make any effort to look over

the wall that stood everlastingly between them, as though she had learned that a state of mental tiptoe is productive of nothing but mental debility. On one side of it Jeremy went on his way: on the other, she hers, their lives unendingly and utterly apart. Yet there were times when she was sorry for him, when she was pierced by this look he wore of one continually thwarted and cheated. She wondered if things would have been better if she had given him a family of sons, and thought, that when after the twins Elizabeth was born, Fate had played him a scurvy trick. All the same she realised that Fate had played into her hands: for she could not believe that to a youthful family of sons Jeremy would have evinced this perfection of unconcern. That he did evince it, that he left her children so utterly to her, filled her with passionate happiness, so that she had a moment of tempestuous revolt when he began first to notice Huldah.

Against Elizabeth he cherished for the first five years of her life another grudge beside that of her sex, because for that period it looked as though she was to be the end of Judith's family. But if Jeremy grew impatient so also did Judith. Vague rumours at intervals floated through to her of Jeremy's affairs with other women, which, though the very thought of them cut at the basis of her conception of life, she disregarded. Such things could not be spoken of, and anyway when she looked into her heart she realised that she did not expect constancy from Jeremy, that she did not, by now, expect anything whatever from Jeremy. Their marriage was a failure: she bored him and she knew it. Not only that, but she realised that he believed he had knocked down her wall of reserve and found nothing there; not seeing, ever, that essential self which had eluded him, which she had managed to hide, to guard from the impress of his personality. Yet though she had thus far withdrawn herself, she did not judge him: she did see, in some vague fashion at least, that he had been caught—as badly as she—by the law of opposites. Jeremy would have done better to have married somebody like himself, as much like himself as possible; somebody as coarse, as vital, as hard as he was, somebody who would have borne him sons in

plenty. Such a woman might not only have caught but have held him, as Judith never had and never would. She did not blame him—at least, she did not blame him very much—that he wandered after other fires, but it hurt her that he did not wander farther afield. That girl over at the Tudor Inn at Eye who left, rumour said, with good reason. . . . Judith had seen her—a bold creature, handsome after her fashion with her dark eyes, her great bosom and her red mouth that laughed at men. Oh, but Eye was too near. Eye was hard to bear. If only it had been East Leach or Huish Priors. But, later, when she had to dismiss a servant-maid she grew grateful even for Eye. The girl was a bad worker, but that was not why Judith dismissed her, as the girl—and Jeremy—very well knew. No word of the incident ever passed between Judith and Jeremy, but afterwards whenever Judith had occasion to engage another maid, Jeremy would laugh. “Better get her plain, Ju,” he’d say. “As plain as Beth, if possible.” Jeremy’s third daughter, so he said, was the plainest thing in petticoats. . . .

Jeremy thought she “took it” very well. There was no passion, for or against, in Judith. Just as well, perhaps, and she was at least good-tempered. Her sweetness of disposition, her grave concern with the things of her own narrow but intense little world, formed a barrier Jeremy could never get beyond. He thought it stupidity and began to leave her alone.

But Huldah he did not leave alone. Huldah he took and spoiled. From the first her moderation in the matter of cries and tears must have done a good deal towards reconciling her father to her existence; though to those who knew her later the idea of Huldah Bentley as a “good” baby must have been peculiarly unconvincing. Impossible to believe that her infant serenity could ever have been anything other than the calm of the young creature who understood, even in her cradle, that she was born to command. At five she could do what she liked with her father. ‘T’o look at she was an adorable thing, but it wasn’t for her prettiness Judith loved her with that deep absorbing passion that was like a physical pain, which

had in it still all the hopes and longings of that year which preceded her birth, all the tremulous delight of the months which succeeded it. Huldah was aware of the power of her own charms. She needed discipline, and she was the only one of Jeremy's children who didn't get it, for, as they grew up, their father's unconcern, though it existed still as to their ultimate lot or achievement in life, thinned out into a kind of bullying assertion of parental authority when it was a question of their peccadilloes. Jeremy's hand was always heavy on the wrong-doer within his gates. Only Huldah went scatheless, and when, impelled by her wildness and self-will, Judith protested that her father treated her as though she were a boy, Jeremy would retort, "Then you *give* me a boy, madam, and I'll refrain." Judith could be extraordinarily stupid at times in presenting him with barbs to sharpen for her own breast. It was so he could always make her feel in the wrong, call up that streak of pity for him. . . .

But the years moved on and Judith bore no more children.

Looking back from this outpost of Time they seem, those five years of Judith's resting from producing a family of the wrong sex, to have been exciting enough. History—as Jeremy understood history, which meant wars rather than the fruitful years of peace—was being made. England was engaged in quelling the Indian Mutiny; the continental nations were being reshuffled: the name of Garibaldi crept out of Italy, that of John Brown, of Lincoln, of "Stonewall" Jackson, of Grant and Lee out of America. For long Judith cherished the idea that the war in America was being fought for the emancipation of the slaves of the South, an object which, with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* still fresh in her mind, she thought excused even the slaughter that appalled her. And then Jeremy corrected her ignorance.

"The Yankees are fighting to keep the South—just as we'd fight to keep Ireland," he said, "if she tried to get away from us. You're a sentimentalist, Ju, like all your sex."

And Judith, wiser than she knew, said she thought that people might prefer to have a sentimental reason for fighting.

"Women's talk! What do women know about war? War

doesn't concern women!" said Jeremy, who really believed that it didn't.

At Clutton, too, and for Jeremy, the years were eventful. Old Sacheverell Bentley had died in his Essex parsonage and, more reckless in death than in life, had left his son, unprovisionally, the whole of his personal estate. This Jeremy had speedily converted into hard cash, which explains why in eighteen-sixty, the year which saw the launching of the first English ironclad, Jeremy was able to buy Eye Farm and to start there the draining operations which he had always known were its only hope, for over at Eye Nature fought every inch of the way with man. The farm was built on a mixture of clay and marl which, as sticky as glue in wet weather, became as porous as a honeycomb in time of frost. For a year the farm had stood untenanted, which was probably why its owner—ignorant of Jeremy's schemes—was so willing to have it taken off his hands at the not over-generous figure offered. Jeremy's operations at Eye (and they took him there a good deal, at least as far as the Tudor Inn) enormously deepened his respect for the steam engine, which never tired and which even the stiff gault of Eye could not exhaust. He found that it was an exact economist, and better than all, that it could work in all weathers. Over at Clutton his land was ploughed, his hay mown when all other farms were idle—a fact which did not exactly endear Jeremy to his neighbours, whose horses, unlike Jeremy's engines, were eating their heads off whether they worked or not. That this was a fleeting distinction Jeremy, who was making the most of it, was well enough aware; for that steam had "an agricultural future was by now fairly generally acknowledged. What kept most of his neighbours back was not prejudice, but cash, the lack of which they chose to hide beneath a cloak of scepticism, as Jeremy must have been aware, since he had a field of clover scarified partly by steam and partly by horse-plough, and when it came up invited the "sceptics" to come and see for themselves, to a yard, where the steam plough had left off and the horse plough begun.

So, gradually, steam triumphed in Clutton. Men farming

the same acreage began to buy machines between them : companies were formed for their purchase by instalments, and one by one the small, pretty fields which Judith loved disappeared in favour of the large square ones that harboured the inevitable water tank.

It soon became obvious that Jeremy's operations at Eye, where he had so satisfactorily combined business with pleasure, had been an unqualified success. Years later Eye Farm still served, in those parts, to point a moral and adorn a tale, for Jeremy's machine had sunk drain-pipes into the earth to a depth of several feet and Nature had retired from the conflict. Jeremy farmed the land himself, let the house to his bailiff, and sold the first year's crops at auction for a figure that kept him good-tempered for months.

These for Jeremy were prosperous years. He never denied it, though like all men who could make money he knew the value of every sixpence. It was later that he fell into the bog of cross-cropping experiments and sunk capital in various machinery concerns that came mysteriously to grief when the steam-plough failed to do all that he had expected of it. Even Jeremy, whose passion for progress rose and fell with the steam engine, came to the admission that steam's definite contribution to agriculture was the establishment of railways which brought the farmer wider markets. But in those five years that followed Beth's birth in eighteen-fifty-seven steam was Jeremy's god, and well enough it repaid his homage.

It was in the spring of sixty-two that he came back from a Machinery Exhibition at Leeds to learn that "after all this time" Judith was to have another child. Jeremy had been away several weeks and was pleased to be humorous over Judith's item of news.

He went on being funny about it even in the following January when Eve was born. His strange humour may have masked other things : but Judith had no humour with which to mask anything at all. Her disappointment showed plainly : rose up and stared, naked, from her eyes. Perhaps it was the memory of those stories of Jeremy's affairs with other women—the thought that some other woman (perhaps that

woman at Eye) had given him a son ; but however it was the intensity of her longing for a son of her own frightened her a little, so that at times she could scarcely bear to look at her baby daughter because she fancied the child's eyes were fixed reproachfully upon her. Eve was a plain baby with red hair curling in the nape of her neck and those astonishing eyes which stared unwinkingly back at Huldah who, just past her eighth birthday and very haughty, came and made at her a little grimace of disapproval. But Huldah, as usual, went straight to the point. "Why isn't she a he?" she demanded. "Daddy wanted a he. He told me. Just me and a lot of he's."

But in the December of the following year when Judith produced a boy when nobody any longer expected it of her, Huldah said she did not now see any use in a baby brother. "He ought to have come 'stead of Mary or Beth," she said, "'stead of Mary'd have been best." She spoke as one born to correct Fate chronologically. "I'm nine. When he's as old as me I'll be grown up and with a husband. I don't see the good of him *now*."

Jeremy's satisfaction in the event was tempered not only by the reflection that Judith, just when she "had learned the trick of it" could never repeat it, but also by the fee he had paid to Sir Godfrey Frayle. Sir Godfrey Frayle had come down from town and saved Judith's life, though when he pocketed his fee and drove away it was by no means certain he had done anything of the kind. Jeremy had not liked Sir Godfrey, who had behaved as though he held Jeremy responsible for the mess Judith had made of this business he regarded as "her job."

"Your wife will recover, Mr. Bentley. But she will have no more children."

Just that. No warning, not even a threat: just a plain statement of fact. "Your wife will have no more children." Seven children, if you counted the twins, as Jeremy hardly did, in eleven years! That seemed reasonable enough to Jeremy, who wanted to know what women were here for if not to produce children.

But Sir Godfrey was right. Judith never did have any more

children. Since Clive's birth she had grown much thinner, so that you saw for the first time how high were her cheek-bones, how far back they seemed to be pushing her eyes, which appeared to have grown enormous. Her faint magnolia colouring had gone : and the shadows beneath the thrust-back eyes were so dark they seemed to lie on the pale skin like a bruise. She began to look not like Chalon's miniature at all, but like a Burne-Jones portrait, and Burne-Jones, unfortunately, was an artist whose sitters Jeremy did not happen to admire. He considered, quite simply, that Judith—very inconsiderately, at twenty-nine—had lost her looks.

The first few years in the life of the expensive Clive who, if he had nearly cost his mother her life, had also cost his father a hundred guineas, seemed to interest Jeremy not very much more than had those of his infant daughters. Judith had Clive, as she had had all her other babies, to herself. She was tremendously grateful to Jeremy for that, even though at times she almost came to believe that he did not very much care, after all, that at length she had given him a son ; supposed, not knowing that Jeremy's time with Clive was not yet, that it was a habit in men to want what they didn't happen to possess. But Judith's passion for her son stopped only this side of idolatry ; she knew it, and stood still to reflect, even now, at intervals, that her baby daughter's eyes rested reproachfully upon her. As the child grew the impression remained with her ; so that, in a way, even Judith believed what the others affirmed, that Eve was jealous of her brother. Certainly it was true that out of her usual quiet and reserve there would spring at times sudden tremendous demonstrations of affection for her mother, queer odd moods of disaffection towards her brother of whom, for days, she would sometimes take no notice at all. "Eve's jealous," said her father. "She'd like to be cock of the walk, wouldn't you, Eve ? But you're not pretty enough, my dear !" She displayed jealousy, too, of Huldah, not as did Mary and Beth because of what she could do with her father, but, even as with Clive, because of what she could do with her mother. It outraged her sense of justice that Judith, retiring hurt and baffled by some unbearably naughty

mood of Huldah's, should punish her for pulling Huldah's hair in protest, whilst she made no sort of effort to punish Huldah's offence which had occasioned it. Her love for her mother was so deep, so much of a passion, that she could not bear it when she wasn't "fair." Her love was at once tender and hard: all her life to love, for Eve, meant to judge not less harshly, but more severely. She could not bear what she loved to fall below the standard she set up for it. The watchful, judicial air which with the years grew up about Eve irritated her father and disconcerted even Judith.

But she was plain. Outrageously plain, Jeremy decided, like the rest of his family, with a strange pale little face, peculiarly her own, and a wealth of red hair hanging to her waist. Red hair, which had come into fashion somewhere about Eve's third birthday, had gone out again before her fourth, and, anyway, the fashion had never reached Clutton. Among her sisters Eve's red hair was a reproach, yet she bore them no grudge for their epithets, as if in her composition there were no vanity at all. But she hated her father's personal comments upon her lack of resemblance to either side of her family. "She's neither Dale nor Bentley," he would say, good-tempered these days, to Judith. "It isn't decent. How do you account for it, Ju?" and he would look quizzically at Judith as if he expected her to answer. She never did, but always she blushed—and that blush hurt Eve as the personal remarks of her sisters never could. But though Judith blushed still at Jeremy's joking allusion to those weeks of absence at the Leeds Exhibition, she did not realise that it was not for that she hated him, but because he could ask Huldah (who looked so much older and so much more "knowing" than she really was) if she had any idea who Eve's father could be. A sense of humour might have saved her, but Judith was an old-fashioned woman and did not think this a subject for humour. And Huldah, understanding nothing, for all her knowing ways, save that her father was being amusing and that together they had hit upon a really excellent joke, would shout with laughter. But once, many years later, when Eve was barely thirteen, Jeremy happened to make the old joke again

in her presence. And Eve didn't laugh. Quick as a breath she reached out her hand and smacked her father's face. Nothing ever took Jeremy so completely unawares, for it wasn't as though the child understood, he said, retailing the incident later to his hunting friends. But in a way the flash of spirit pleased the bully in him.

Yet he had little affection for his youngest daughter and early discovered—Jeremy, who saw so little that mattered about his children!—her unamiable trick of holding aloof, of standing back and considering these people into whose midst she had been born, though you had to exclude Judith, who was the only person for whom the child ever evinced an affection, from whom she craved it. But Judith herself, partly because she was betrayed from within, but partly, too, because, like everybody else, she was deceived by that sturdy air of independence Eve carried about with her, never seemed aware of it. She prided herself upon her lack of favouritism among her children—despite the evidence of her own heart, yet because of that evidence urged herself to the strictest justice, except when she was caught and held by the swift misery that assailed her when she contemplated what she considered the outrageous exploits of her first-born.

Eve, so Jeremy thought and said, was a prig, and prigs, he would have her know, were always detested by the more ordinary folk they despised. "Prig" was a new word to Eve, and the only available dictionary defined it for her as "a pert conceited fellow: a thief," neither of which seemed to her accurate as descriptions of herself and merely convinced her that her father must have used a wrong word. Jeremy, confronted with this, roared with laughter and seemed to imagine his case against her proved in detail.

As a child there was about Eve a moral straightness, a sense of her own worth (her own superiority, as Jeremy said) which prevented her from following the backstairs method of dealing with the problems of life which Huldah thought fit to employ. "Coaxing things out of people . . . getting your own way by *stroking* them," she would say, and in her scornful accents there was already some hint of the irritated and irritating Eve

who later saw not only the women of Clunbury Hall, but of all the world, coaxing things out of men who were reluctant to give them up. From this orgy of feminine cajolery she and her mother alone at Clunbury Hall turned away. But it pursued you; Martha the kitchenmaid coaxing cook; cook coaxing the gardener when she wanted something special from his domains; Mary and Beth coaxing their governess and attempting to coax their mother. Huldah coaxing things from her father. Nobody had the trick so excellently as Huldah, yet, howsoever you practised it or upon whom, it remained essentially the same trick, and Eve would have none of it. She loved that cold, distant look which came upon her mother's face when Mary and Beth tried the trick on her, or when she watched Huldah trying it upon her father. And she loved what her mother said: "Child, child, I don't want to be coaxed to give you things that are good for you."

But Jeremy did. It was the essence of his giving. If you didn't coax you didn't want. If you couldn't coax you didn't get. Huldah's wheedling voice, her soft arms and softer voice gave him a riotous sense of power. It was a pleasure, he considered, which Judith had consistently denied him. Young Eve, he thought, had her mother's beastly pride. And her coldness. You couldn't get at them. They belonged (though Jeremy did not realise this) to themselves.

Mary and Eve were called, in their turn, "good" children. So, too, later, was Clive. They did not get into "scrapes," they behaved well in the schoolroom, a fact for which Judith, who suffered intensely as one by one her children grew old enough for Jeremy to punish, could never be thankful enough. The casual way Jeremy administered a box on the ears made her blood run cold, whilst his savage threats of bread and water for trifling offences had a curiously opposite effect. She came near to hating Jeremy when he pounced upon some childish delinquency, some prank of high spirits, as if it were a criminal offence; though there were times when even she began to wonder whether a good whipping might not, earlier, have done Huldah excellent service. But Huldah was a law unto herself and had never been wholesomely corrected. The others, so

Judith thought, did not require it. Mary (and Judith saw it with a pang) was naturally docile : she was afraid to get into scrapes. Eve (and Judith saw this less plainly) avoided them by virtue of that inherent element of aloofness, that streak of native prig, of pride in her composition. But there was something else—something that Judith didn't see at all, either then or at any other time. It was true of Eve in her childish rebellions and it remained true of those others, so much more desperate and so much more hopeless which came to her later ; they could always be controlled by the hurt look they called up in her mother's face. Unable though she was to understand why it hurt her so violently to see it, she always capitulated before it. Early and late the victories Jeremy claimed as his were nearly always, so far as Eve was concerned, not his at all, but Judith's.

It was Beth who became her father's justification of what Judith called his "savage" methods ; Beth who at twelve was beaten for being found in one of her father's cornfields with her arm 'round the neck of the son of a neighbouring farmer. Beth, Jeremy said, had a taste for low company (which seemed to argue that it was less the kissing than the kissed which annoyed him) and appeared to think that a whipping might teach her better. It didn't. It only taught her to find more secluded spots for her youthful flirtations. There was no harm, she said, in kissing. Then had Huldah, true daughter of her father, approaching fourteen and mighty scornful, reduced for her the whole ethics of kissing into a matter of kissing the right people. "We," she told the disgraced and disgraceful Beth, "don't kiss the sons of the common farmers."

Huldah didn't, but Huldah wouldn't need to, and the corners of Beth's over-red mouth had drooped as if even then she realised that if she didn't she'd never kiss anybody. Certainly she was already much more at home with the farmers' sons than with youths of what Jeremy called her own class, of whom as she grew up she did not see too many. Neither did she appear to have an overwhelming affection for her own sex and was inclined to be scornful of Eve, who so obviously had, and of Mary who pretended she had. Beth agreed with

Huldah that women were a dull lot. . . . Jeremy, however, had whipped a good deal of deceit into a nature that in the beginning had been singularly free from it, without in any degree affecting the child's queer passion for kisses. It was better to be kissed and whipped than not to be kissed at all. And Judith could not save her from the whippings: that look on her face which hurt Eve like a physical blow, which was at once her challenge to Jeremy, her plea to the misbehaving, did nothing here with either the one or the other. Beth had her pleasures and took her punishment until even Jeremy had to admit that she was too old for his cane and fell back on the verbal lash. At least, beneath that he could make her wince.

At sixteen Huldah was the toast of her father's hunting circle, at whom she made eyes impartially. Then, as ever, she was good to look at—tall and finely made, with impudent dark eyes, brilliant colouring and a mop of black hair which attracted attention because it was still short and curled up tightly over her head. She had extremely pretty ankles and took advantage of the new shorter skirts to show them off, and drew attention to them by wearing the daring new high heels. She never tight-laced, but took the greatest care of her complexion and probably thanked God on her knees for the advent of the Dolly Varden hat. At sixteen she rode to hounds, had already been "blooded" and knew an astonishing amount about life, which, in the country, turned a frank enough face to her. By it Huldah was neither shocked nor revolted. She knew how animals were born and mated and found it all profoundly fitting and natural. She had the slight, insolent contempt for her own sex that she kept for all things weaker than herself (like cats and dogs and birds). It extended to her mother and to her governess, both of whom evidently thought it disgraceful that she should know the things she did. Women, on the whole, this beautiful Miss Bentley decided, did *not* know things and were a faded lot into the bargain. The only useful thing they did was to have children, though they made much ado about it, never did anything else that mattered and weren't able, while they were doing it, even to keep their husband's admiration. High-spirited and shrewd, she had early learnt to despise

her mother, and to admire her father, who got what he wanted, or a good deal of what he wanted. Men were her natural prey, yet she had for them also that faint, insolent contempt—perhaps because she had always found it so easy to do what she liked with them.

At nine, Eve was deeply sensible of this habit of contempt of her sister's mind. She was not very disturbed by her knowledge that Huldah contemned herself and Mary and Beth, but she minded passionately that she contemned her mother. It infuriated her when she showed, as she so frequently did, that she thought her mother stupid and ineffectual; despised her for not wanting things for herself, or, at any rate, for not getting them, which was Huldah's test for wanting things. Her mother never contradicted her father, never opposed him; and, worse than all, hadn't been able to keep her looks. She was faded; old before her time. You couldn't blame father, she said to Mary, if what they said about him were true. . . . All *right*, if Mary didn't *want* to hear, she needn't. . . . Anyway, father liked women to be pretty, and you couldn't really believe, could you, that mother ever was? "But she was . . . she *is*," Eve objected once, pointing to the little miniature for proof. "She's got the loveliest eyes and mouth." "*Had*, you mean," Huldah said. "If she really looked like that why couldn't she have stopped like it? To lose all your looks by the time you're thirty-six!"

But Eve went on thinking her mother beautiful just as she went on loving her with that strange, unchildish passion not hurt at all by the inner knowledge that somehow her mother loved Huldah and Clive better than she loved her, better than she loved any of them. And she did not believe that her mother wanted things she didn't have. Except when her father was angry or in one of his unreasonable moods her mother was happy. "She's happy when she's with us *children*, anyhow." It was so long since Huldah had grown up that she'd forgotten. You were frightfully old, of course, when you were nearly eighteen. . . .

And at "nearly eighteen" it rather looks as if Huldah went some part of the way at least towards meriting the

that in Beth there was, perhaps, a strain of her father. But when, later, someone else presented her with that piece of knowledge she was so unspeakably shocked that it was obvious it couldn't possibly have occurred to her before. She accepted—if regretfully and without understanding—in a man what she could never have accepted or, even, ever so faintly understood, in a woman. She would have died rather than think one of her own daughters—like that. But she hoped the “really and truly sweetheart” would be encouraged. Beth was no longer a child, to get into “scrapes” over boys. She hoped Jeremy would be reasonable, though the veto upon Huldah's choice was, perhaps, no good augury. But Jeremy would never think anybody good enough for Huldah. There was at least a chance that he might, over Beth, be more easily satisfied. Judith wanted her girls to marry. She believed with her generation that any marriage was better than none at all; that at least marriage gave a woman busy days and children and that in these things, for a woman, was happiness. Judith, too, was inclined to hug the thought of her grandchildren as if she saw them filling that long span of days when Clive and Eve should be independent of her as already were Huldah and Mary and Beth.

She was so quiet now, revolving these things, that Eve grew impatient.

“Mummy, you haven't asked me who it is Beth's going with now. Don't you want to know?”

Judith did, rather, but she scorned to get her information about one child from another.

“Eve, you know I never listen to tales. Suppose it were Beth telling me something about you?”

“She couldn't—about boys. I never look at them.”

“Well, you're not very old yet, are you, darling?”

“I'll be twelve next year. That's a good age. And going with boys isn't anything to do with how old you are, it's *liking* them. . . . I don't—much. Nasty stuck-up things who know everything. Clive's got *frightfully* know-everything since Mr. Clark came.”

Judith laughed.

"There is a little girl, too, I think, who suffers from the same complaint," she said. "Run upstairs and see what has happened to Clive. . . . It's long past tea-time. Knock at the door, present my compliments to Mr. Clark and say that tea is on the table."

Clive. . . . Always Clive. . . . It was too bad. The judicial Eve rose up and vanquished that nicer Eve who had offered to devote a long life to an aged mother. She hadn't been a bit grateful. . . . In her way, mother was as selfish as Huldah and Beth, who only thought of themselves. Her mother only thought of Clive. Even if you *weren't* jealous you couldn't help noticing. Her mother had favourites and mothers oughtn't. When she was married (and she may as well get married, since her mother didn't seem to like the idea of having her at home for ever) with lots of children of her own, *she* wouldn't have favourites. Victory was summarily snatched from Eve the judicial by Eve the prig.

And it was that priggish Eve who marched off to the school-room and delivered a variant of Judith's message. Eve-putting-everybody-right had a trick of taking the natural politeness out of her voice and putting it back as a sharp edge.

"Mother's compliments, Mr. Clark, and may Clive please come to his tea?"

CHAPTER FOUR

IT was in eighteen-seventy-three that Huldah made a runaway match of it with young Tom Coutts, about whom her father had told her not to make a fool of herself. They were married in Scotland under the ægis of a sympathetic aunt of Tom's and then settled down in London, where everybody was reading *Middlemarch* or learning to roller-skate or to play lawn-tennis, and where, just a year later, Huldah's son was born. She came home then, sunning herself in her father's forgiveness and flaunting her son in her arms with the air of one who said, "What a fuss women have made all these years about nothing." Judith did not in the least know what to say to this surprising young person who was so obviously of opinion that a woman was no good if she couldn't do her "own job" properly. But she adored Huldah's baby.

The next year Huldah was killed in the hunting field. She had come to Clutton *sans* husband and baby. Tom, as befitted the mere male, was too busy to leave town, and as for the baby, "I thought he'd be too much for you," Huldah said airily to Judith, who said nothing, but looked as though you'd stuck a knife into her.

Of that tragedy of the hunting field Eve remembered nothing, save her mother's white face and the dreadful way in which, quite unexpectedly, she would put up her hands to her face and turn her head so that you should not see the tears trickling through her thin fingers. Something deep down in Eve was hurt intensely every time that happened; it was the only way the tragedy of her sister's death ever reached her. She thought it must be awful to mind anything so much as that, and in her childish fashion she vowed that she never would.

No recollection whatever of the funeral, as though the torrential rains of that day had washed it entirely from her mind. And after the funeral nothing whatever but Jeremy's temper. Never good, it broke now over the house like a hurricane, before which Beth's "really and truly sweetheart" and Mary's one pale love-affair presently went down.

Mary and Beth probably chose their moments badly, and though no moment perhaps could have been too good, they did undoubtedly suffer because Huldah the beautiful was dead, whilst they, alive, and not beautiful in the very least, came clamouring (it was Jeremy's word) for things of their own. But also they suffered because the Couttses, still sore over Jeremy's bitter opposition to his daughter's match with their son, would not be more "reasonable" over Huldah's child, and seemed to imagine that they were being, indeed, not only reasonable, but more than generous in agreeing to his half-yearly visits to Clunbury Hall. His death just a year later from some childish complaint, put an early end to what looked like being a bitter family dispute.

To Jeremy, so savagely unhappy just then that the very thought of anybody else's happiness was like a knife turning in a deep, still-bleeding wound, Beth's reiterated plea for happiness was little short of an indecency. And her antecedents, poor child, did not help her. She had got herself talked about, not in Huldah's triumphant fashion as the Sought-After, but as the Seeker-After. And she hadn't Huldah's beauty, nor, indeed, to Jeremy's eye, any beauty at all. She was a big apple-cheeked girl with her father's features and hair as thick and coarse as his, a fact which Jeremy seemed to resent as an impertinence upon her part. He saw no beauty in her strength and vitality any more than he saw beauty in Mary, who was palely coloured, palely featured and too tame of soul to hate him, as did Beth, for that phrase, "Penny plain, twopence coloured," in which he made joking allusion to the fact that he did not consider Mary an improvement upon her sister, but merely a variation.

Mary at this time was nearly twenty, and had never before had a love-affair. Beth, two years her junior, had already, in

popular opinion, had too many. It was Beth's peculiar misfortune that all the young men who were attracted by her were of the class which Huldah had long ago scornfully indicated as the one at which the Sacheverell Bentleys could not possibly look. And Jeremy would not look at young Dave Rusthall, when that daring young man sought an interview and proclaimed that he "meant business," that he wanted to marry Squire Bentley's daughter.

To the end Judith counselled patience, because, somehow, it was easier to believe Jeremy would relent than that he would not. But Dave Rusthall—and Dave's father—knew better. The farmers of Clutton, though they disliked Jeremy, would have disliked still more to cross him. Dave himself had no pluck, or not that sort of pluck, at least, but he had his pride and there were many girls whose fathers would be more reasonable than Beth's, even though it was true Dave wanted none of them as he wanted Beth. So, within a year, Dave married one of these reasonably-fathered girls, at which for a week Beth cried herself to sleep at night and became very clever at hiding herself by day. Eventually a surprisingly indifferent Beth appeared, stifling beneath that outward show of sullenness and silence a heart which throbbed with bitterness because Dave had not cared enough to fight for her, nor to wait until she was twenty-one and might snap her fingers at her father.

She might choose, next time, Jeremy said, a young man of her own class, not seeming to see how severely such young men left her alone, as if they resented her low choice in lovers or were not attracted by her milkmaid good looks. And the young men of the class Jeremy placed below her own, the young men of Dave Rusthall's class, though they did undeniably find her attractive, were desperately cautious. None of them cared to come openly courting Beth Bentley after the short shrift Jeremy had accorded young Rusthall. But they did not leave her altogether alone, which, in its way, was a pity, since from the attentions they gave her and her manner of receiving them, she acquired nothing but a reputation for husband-hunting. And though there was nothing more certain than that marriage

was Beth's proper business in life, the young men of Clutton did begin, as she grew older, to leave her alone, and so to her reputation for husband-hunting there was added, gradually, another for sullenness and bad temper. Yet even Judith, brought to the point, had to admit that Beth, as a child, had been neither sullen nor bad-tempered. She was vaguely aware, too, that Beth despised her because she had failed her : because she had counselled patience instead of fighting : instead of herself fighting Jeremy on Beth's behalf. Yet how did one "fight" Jeremy? It was a secret Judith never learned, even if she had cared for fighting.

Mary's affair was of a totally different nature—a pale shadowy thing like Mary herself. From it emerged the fact that Mary would undoubtedly be an old maid. The young man was a clerk in the offices of Jeremy's solicitors, with neither money nor family, which may or may not have been why Jeremy put a heavy foot upon the light. And Mary, though she obediently turned away her eyes, wept a little when the young man married another, and blushed (so Beth said spitefully) when she met him a year later with his wife on the steps of Clutton church, going in to the christening of their first-born. Perhaps she did not greatly care : perhaps her emotions were as palely coloured as her face and hair : or merely that always it came more easily to her to submit than to fight. Of Mary you knew nothing save the songs she sang and the things she said, both of which amounted to but little. You saw that she was fond of her mother in her vague, negative fashion, and afraid of her father in a fashion that was neither vague nor negative. Even her solicitor's clerk, perhaps, could have done very little for Mary, who was born tame, with not so much as a grudging admiration for the thing she never could be. She would not have cared to have been like Beth, who ran after men and got herself talked about.

But Jeremy, stiff with pride and filled with that impulse to hurt for no better reason than that he himself was suffering, looked round for fresh targets at which to aim, and as luck would have it encountered his small son, not yet thirteen at this time and recovering from some childish ailment that

seemed to have made his eyes too large for his face. The sight of him, small and thin beneath his mother's tending hands, diffident and uneasy beneath his father's reconnoitring glances, was strangely irritating to Jeremy. God, what had he done? What had he *done* to be served like this? That vital creature born a girl and killed in a moment before his eyes, and this pale boy for his only son, looking as though a puff of wind would blow him away. His very good looks were in a way an offence to Jeremy. Good looks of a kind, he called them: the small, neat features of the Dales, unspoiled by interference from the more sprawling lineaments of the Bentleys. Too pretty for a boy and too gentle. Judith was making of him a mother's darling. He wanted hardening. So in the autumn of seventy-six, the year in which Mary attained her majority (the only thing, Beth said, either of them was ever likely to attain) Clive went to school, two whole years before Judith had expected it.

There remained for Jeremy's attentions only Eve, at this time a tall leggy girl approaching fourteen, with still the pale, elfish face of her childhood, a wide, humorous mouth revealing excellent teeth, a mop of bronze hair and those astonishing blue-grey eyes that made you think, oddly enough, of banners in the wind. But Jeremy, who was not likely to think of anything of the kind, who did not admire red hair and thought a wide mouth a mistake on a woman, however good her teeth, found Eve as devastatingly plain as he found her sisters. Yet it was borne in upon him that there was "something in" Eve if you could only get at it—and Jeremy couldn't. He was galled by the self-possession of this leggy young creature who showed him no affection, never coaxed for a thing, but asked for it as if it were her right, and if it were refused moved proudly away as if after all she could very well do without it. She had a genius for avoiding dissension, for skirting rows, which was probably why Jeremy thought her an unpleasant child and hated what he called her superiority, that quiet, judicial air she carried about with her and which tended to deepen as she grew older. Yet if during those years of adolescence she had shown him any affection, any attention,

even, he was ready enough to overlook his ancient grudge of sex against her ; for though he did not care for her he had begun to hear that she was considered clever and was flattered, as fathers are apt to be, by the possession of brains by their daughters. Jeremy, in fact, with that unhealed wound of his, was rapidly approaching the position when he would have taken Eve's braininess as some sort of exchange for Huldah's dead-and-gone beauty and charm. Yet to even the most casual of observers Eve must have appeared as a rather plain girl with good colouring and reserved manners, who did not care for her father, but adored her mother. Nobody was likely to blame her for that, for all Clutton voted Judith a sweet creature with an impossible husband.

And since Huldah's death Jeremy's reputation had scarcely improved, so that life at Clunbury Hall had narrowed considerably. Jeremy had never been overburdened with friends : most of the people in Clutton were not good enough for Jeremy and those who were did not consider Jeremy good enough for them, though many of them liked Judith and invited her to tea, and occasionally went over to Clunbury Hall on a similar errand. But for the rest, all the entertaining that had been done by Judith was for the coarser spirits among Jeremy's hunting circle, from which it emerged that though sport may draw all Englishmen together it does not necessarily include their wives. This link now, however, was straining fast to the snapping point, for not once since Huldah's death had Jeremy ridden to hounds. Not the sort of men to live with gloom and a perpetual grudge against Fate, they declared that Jeremy had become a recluse, whilst those who had refused to have anything to do with him appeared to believe that he had seen the finger of God in that tragedy of the hunting field, that it was very proper he should, and (once again) that Judith was a woman to be pitied.

But Judith wouldn't have thanked them. Now, as ever, she thought extremely little about herself ; she lived, as she always had lived, in the lives of her children and was too heavily concerned just then over the happiness of her two elder daughters to have time to spare for her own. For all they

Children. . . . "Never, never," said Eve to herself, "never in all the world. I would die rather than endure such a thing."

She grew sorry for her mother, ridiculously, outrageously sorry: because she had "put up with things" and because she had fallen from the pedestal on which, years ago, Eve had placed her, which meant, also, that Eve was a little sorry, too, for herself, because she was always sorry for herself when people disappointed her, when they failed to preserve a balance on the dizzy summits to which she elevated them. But all that quiet and dignity which she had thought strength. . . . It *couldn't* be, of course. . . . You couldn't have any strength of character if you submitted to things of that kind. . . .

As for Judith, who had tried not to see that her children had grown up with appalling rapidity, Eve had stripped the last veil from her eyes: Eve she saw now as desperately grown up, though she was not yet seventeen and still at school. Here in the winter of seventy-nine, towards the close of a year of unhappy memories—the memory of a sunless summer, of persistent rains and ruined crops—Judith began to suspect that the dreams she had woven about her children were not, after all, coming true. Despite her efforts Mary and Beth were still unmarried: Clive, faced with the choice of Church or Army, had decided in favour of the Army and would before very long go to Sandhurst. Judith bowed her head before this fact that her boy was to be a soldier as she did before the fact that each time he came home from school he was a little more of a stranger, a little further removed from his old-time need of her, a little less able to stand what he now, as well as Jeremy, called her "fussing."

In spite of herself Judith began to feel a little outworn—superseded. She, who had wanted to be all in all to somebody, as she had been to her babies, as she had dreamed once, briefly, that she was to Jeremy, was now indispensable to nobody. Her chance had gone by. Time had taken what she had and given her nothing instead. She had kept Eve longest and Eve, too, was gone now. Eve didn't need her: she could stand alone and her love, these days, was streaked with pity.

Judith could not bear that her children should be sorry for her: she was not sorry for herself. Despite the things she had missed she had been happy. In all those long years when her children had been small, when there had been so much to do, so much to look forward to, it had seemed to her that her well of happiness was sunk so deep it could never run dry—that some drop of it must remain with her to the end. She was happy so long as she could remember . . . so long as she could forget, and she never lost the sense that in some measure at least Jeremy had secured so much less from life than she had. Even Judith could not but be aware, here at the end of seventy-nine, with a Royal Commission sitting to inquire into the extent and intensity of agricultural distress, that Jeremy was not without his worries. Yet it was she who had persuaded Jeremy to allow Eve to stay at school as she wished until she could sit for matriculation. She would be ready, she said, for the next examination.

"Matriculation?" said Jeremy, "why on earth should she want to sit for matriculation?"

"I don't know," Judith said, "but she does."

"And what good's it going to do her, I'd like to know?"

"I don't know that, either. But I think Eve does. . . . She has her plans, I'm sure."

"Damned expensive ones, too, I'll be bound," said Jeremy. "I've no money for anyone's plans. Do you know what wheat is down to?"

"No," said Judith. She never did know what wheat was down to. That ancient grudge she bore against Jeremy's mockery of her initial endeavours to take an interest in his affairs had for ever prevented her from knowing anything whatever about the price of wheat. And sometimes she was ashamed of herself because of it. . . .

She was a little ashamed of herself now, as Jeremy told her the price of wheat and emphasised it with an oath. A bad harvest to boot and trouble looming ahead with the cattle. The floods had wrought havoc among the sheep, and over at Imberford and away to Huish they had liver-rot already. It would get to Eye and to Clutton, and would take years to

stamp out. Years. Jeremy knew what he was talking about. What money did she think *he* had for her daughter's rubbishy plans? None. She could tell Madam Eve that.

But Judith didn't and she managed so to frame Jeremy's consent to the extra year at school that it never occurred to Eve there had been much difficulty about it. She accepted it with an irritating air of calm that entirely overlooked any part her mother might have played in bringing the decision about. Judith, vaguely and as she realised, unreasonably, was disappointed: she wanted Eve to know that she had striven even though she shrank from announcing it. She had not thought Eve would fail so completely to divine her part in it, even though she knew the Eve of to-day was an uncertain quantity, chary of showing affection for anybody, even her mother: an Eve grown defiant, a little hard and terribly critical of existence at Clunbury Hall. Eve judged people. . . . Judith saw that. You had to come up to Eve's standard or she had no use for you. She judged her father, sifting and weighing evidence, making out her case, learning it by heart. And she judged her mother: her mother, who had "submitted," put up with things. Eve wore an air, these days, of "putting up" with just nothing at all.

She took a first in her Matriculation, which somewhat staggered Jeremy, but her announcement that she wanted to go on with her studies, that she wanted to be a doctor, staggered him far more. So this was the first of those "plans" her mother had talked about! And here, now, was Eve herself talking about them, not to be easily put off, either, deuce take it! She had obviously been to a good deal of pains over the case she presented to her father. There wasn't anything she had overlooked: she knew just what a woman could do in the medical training world and where she could do it, and she knew, too, the things that a woman, then, could not do anywhere. Jeremy, at first unusually bereft of words, presently recovered sufficiently to say the only thing that mattered—the one thing that made hay of all her fine arguments. A medical education was a costly business, even more costly (so she had just been kind enough to inform him) for

a woman than for a man ; and even if he had approved of such an education for a daughter of his he could not afford it. That, certainly did stagger Eve, who always took money for granted and evinced no more interest in her father's agricultural pursuits than did Judith. She listened dismally to Jeremy's story of disappointing investments ; of the previous year's bad harvest, the miserable price of corn, the ravages of the fluke parasite among the sheep, his recent outlay upon further steam tackle, the wet seasons having practically driven all horses off the land . . . and the best thing for'em, too.

" Why don't you *hire* the tackle ? " Eve asked, " instead of sinking your capital ? Clunbury and Eye are neither of them large enough, surely, to warrant such an outlay ? "

Jeremy passed the impudence of the unsolicited opinion in his unwonted eagerness to impress upon her that it was not only Clunbury and Eye he had in mind. Buoyed up by the recent boom in steam power brought about by the need to expedite farm matters so seriously hindered by the heavy rains of seventy-nine, he believed more firmly than ever that the salvation of the farmer was in steam. He believed that the growing of wheat in England was to be enormously augmented, that the areas under cultivation would be immeasurably extended as steam power brought into play the latent fertility of the clay soils of England. Already he had been buying land extensively. Next year, if the damned rains held off, he would be farming another hundred and fifty acres out Imberford way.

So did Jeremy, unaccountably, unfold his dream of a self-sufficient, a self-feeding England before this arrogant young daughter of his, who never moved an eyelash, upon whose pale, frowning countenance there flickered neither a shadow of sympathy nor interest. Her father was mad—experiment-mad, theory-mad. Wasn't the whole of Clutton aware of it ? She kicked his dreams on one side, anger flecking the grey-blue eyes with little points of light, her words clipped and sharp.

" Then you refuse ? You won't do anything for me ? "

" Oh, damn it all, my girl," said Jeremy. " My hands are tied. Surely you can see that ? My first duty is to your brother. Boys have to have a profession."

"And girls? What about us?"

Jeremy was reassuring.

"You'll get married," he told her.

"Supposing I don't? Supposing we don't, any of us, get married? What then? Do you expect to keep us boxed up here all our lives? Father, you *can't* mean to do *nothing* for me."

"What can I do? I'm not made of money. There isn't enough money for the two of you, I tell you."

"Not enough for us—and your . . . *schemes*."

It was so she jabbed again at Jeremy's dreams.

"Not enough for us—and yours."

It was so Jeremy jabbed at hers.

And she couldn't stand it. Her panic burst through the mask of her habitual calm as she turned upon him.

"But you're my *father*. You owe me something."

"And you're my daughter. You owe me respect."

"You make it rather difficult for me to give it."

Jeremy must have felt the stab in words or tone, for the red-brown of his face deepened.

"Now what the devil do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Adroitly Eve withdrew the dagger, as was her way. The reasonable note in her voice, reinforced by an unusual suavity and appeal, did successful battle with the note of panic.

"Oh, father, don't let us quarrel. I'm dependent on you. I know that. I haven't a farthing of my own and I can't move an inch without money. Look here, father. Just let me try. I'll strike a bargain with you. If I fail . . . the very first time, father . . . you can stop funds. But I *won't* fail. I promise you that. I won't waste your money, father."

But Jeremy stuck to his point. There wasn't enough for her and for Clive . . . and boys had to have a profession. He brandished that statement afresh before her as though it had been a flaming sword. For the moment Eve knew herself beaten.

"Very well," she said, "I'll wait until Clive has his commission. May I ask you again then?"

Jeremy conceded this, but he wondered why it must be

this conceited young daughter of his who came saying, "I *won't* fail, father. I promise you that," whilst his son—his only son for whom he had waited so long—should come so gloomily prophesying failure. "I hope you won't be very disappointed if I don't get through this. . . . I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I got ploughed, sir." And ploughed he frequently was! Bah! Nature didn't know her business. Why couldn't she have given Clive's looks to Eve, Eve's brains to Clive?

So there was her brother standing full in the path down which Eve wanted to move. And here her father at her elbow indicating unmistakably that there wasn't room for the two of them. Eve thought Clive rather stupid, and was tremendously pleased to discover that she did with ease what her brother did only by resolute hard work. She was amused at the idea of him as a soldier and at his easy masculine assumption that it was men who did all the things in the world worth while, all the things that mattered.

But the idea of her son as a soldier never for one moment amused Judith, and though his failures angered his father they were an undoubted source of consolation to his mother. For she cherished the belief that if he could not get into the Army he would, of course, be received by the Church.

Jeremy laughed.

"Not good enough for his Queen, but good enough for his God," he said. "The Almighty ought to be flattered."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE years went by.

Eighteen-eighty-one, and the year of Majuba.
“An insult to the British flag,” said Jeremy, “that must be wiped out in blood.” “Somebody else’s blood,” said Eve, and, “Wars, always wars,” said Judith in her helpless fashion.

Eighteen-eighty-two—the year of the Phoenix Park murders and the shifting of the world’s storm centre from Ireland to Egypt. The year of Tel-el-Kebir.

Eighteen-eighty-three, the year of Eve’s twentieth birthday.

Eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three, years in which Clive struggled with his examinations and maddened his sister with his failures. During them Eve must have been a trying young woman to live with, and certainly for all Jeremy’s belief that his meek family bore him, it does not appear that he entirely welcomed Eve in the rôle of critic on the hearth. Those years of waiting must have been hard to endure: would have been much harder but for the hours she spent in Dr. Furlow’s study, where she might betake herself, he said, whenever she liked and read whatever she chose. But he was obviously amused at her ambition and made no secret of the fact that he thought she would soon grow tired. Not that Eve minded that. Men, she said, acquiring these days a dangerous habit of generalisation which never entirely left her—men would never take women seriously.

Difficult not to believe that Jeremy did not get a certain amount of satisfaction out of that second and final refusal. He had now a much better case: was able to put before his sceptical young daughter some clear statement of his financial

position. It didn't, certainly, even to Eve's disbelieving eyes, look too hopeful. Clive's commission, Clive's allowance; some scheme or other (necessitated by the continuance of the wet seasons) for the preserving of green fodder. Another, less successful, for the artificial drying of hay. His present trials of this stuff boomed from Germany—basic slag, as they called it. His recent heavy ovine losses from the parasitic fluke and his heavy buying in the stockyard, for though Jeremy cared less for stock-breeding than for land-cultivation, he had not been unaffected by the recent fillip given to this side of a farmer's business by the misfortunes in crop-growing of the last few years. A new dairy had been built out from Clunbury Hall. That, said Jeremy, was not built for nothing, and he added a lot about the gloomy report recently issued by Lord Richmond's Committee, to which Eve did not listen too attentively.

But she saw where it was all leading. There were no funds. Nothing at all to spare for this mad idea of hers. She must give it up.

If Eve did not actually give it up, at least she stopped supplicating her father, compelled to that not only by her pride, but by the incurable hopefulness of her spirit which forbade her to believe that her father had really spoken the last word, that he would for ever persist in denying her "her chance." Even here it never once occurred to her that she might perhaps do something with her father by coaxing him. But for that at least her pride was wholly responsible. She would have died rather than get *what she was entitled to* (it was so she thought of it) by that means.

Judith, who knew that was her only chance, silently applauded her for refraining from it: but she, too, tried her hand with Jeremy—and lost. Things, she told Eve, were certainly in a bad way. Later, when they improved she must try again. Eve was very young: there was still time. . . .

But Eve, who had never really supposed her mother could do anything for her, moaned aloud at her utter powerlessness to help herself.

"I haven't even an allowance," she said. "If he'd only

give me what he wastes in one year. If I had only *half* what he lost in that idiotic company last spring."

First and last the only difficulties she recognised were financial. At John Furlow's bogey of prejudice she was long able to laugh. Why, Elizabeth Garrett had taken her degree in eighteen-seventy (in Paris, it was true), and Eve couldn't have been more than three when Sophia Jex-Blake had begun to study medicine at Boston. "Why *shouldn't* there be women doctors?" she demanded. She was really interested in his point of view.

"Well, well, my dear . . . perhaps we don't altogether like the idea. . . . It's a hard life, you know, and women's physical constitution. . . ."

"What's the matter with it? Mine's all right. I've never been ill in my life."

She was, so John Furlow assured her, a most exceptional young lady. He managed to give Eve the impression that the whole race of women was a collection of semi-invalids. But it amused her.

"All the same, you haven't been able to stop Elizabeth Garrett and Sophia Jex-Blake. Women, you see, can be doctors in spite of you."

"Quite so . . . quite so, my dear. But who would employ them?"

"Other women."

Dr. Furlow laughed.

"There, I think, you are mistaken. Now why don't you take up nursing? With the example of Miss Nightingale before you. . . ."

"I *hate* nursing!" said Eve, with strange and passionate emphasis.

"Taking orders wouldn't appeal to you?"

Eve flushed.

"Not at all. It's only that I'd hate to be with sick people . . . all the time, I mean. Why do you say it's because I'd hate to take orders?"

"Well, you're your father's daughter and you're like your sister Huldah, though I expect you scarcely remember her. *She*

could never take an order. If she could have done she might have been alive now. . . . She *would* jump that gate."

Like Huldah! How disgusting! Of course she wasn't. She was a rebel, and Huldah—she remembered perfectly—was nothing of the sort. Huldah didn't want to alter things: she had rather liked the world as it was: had liked men and women to be what she found them. If women were all beautiful and men were all wise. . . .

"I'm twenty-one," she said, taking up the discussion at another point. "Have I got to stay here all my life?"

"My dear young lady, you will get married."

"Oh, don't be so horribly positive about it," Eve said, exasperated. "Besides, marriage doesn't appeal to me. The only thing I care about is a career. . . . I want to push open one of the doors that are standing just ajar." She paused a moment, then shut the big tome on her lap with a little laugh. "No, I don't want to push them, I want to *kick* them," she amended.

John Furlow restored his volume to its rightful position on his shelves and turned to look at her very gravely over his spectacles.

"When you are a little older," he said, "I think you will understand that the only thing a good woman has any business to care about is how she may be the most useful and devoted servant of the man she loves."

At that Eve threw back her head and laughed with joy.

"It's not a bit of use talking to me like that, you know," she said. "Besides, you're only quoting. I don't remember *who* said that, but it was years ago. You're really very old-fashioned, you know, even for an old gentleman of sixty."

She thought he winced at the "old gentleman of sixty," for all he said, airily enough, "Old-fashioned enough, my dear, to believe that there are some things which never change."

"Oh, everything changes," Eve said, "and nearly everybody, thank God. I couldn't bear it if I thought they didn't. I hope some things and some people will manage to change quite a lot. Even you. If you live to be a hundred you may even change your opinions about women. You may even stop

thinking I'd be of more use to the world if I married and became a mother than if I didn't marry and became a doctor. Don't look so shocked. You *do* think it, don't you ? ”

“ Beyond doubt.”

“ You think my mother's life has been—useful—I dare say.”

“ Very useful. She has done her duty. She has given the world five children.”

“ Seven. You forget the twins—everybody does. What's the good of us all ? ”

“ The world needs citizens.”

“ Not useless ones, surely ? ”

“ Your brother is to be a soldier. He will scarcely be useless.”

“ My mother thinks so. She doesn't want Clive to be a soldier, though what a woman wants to make of her son doesn't seem to matter much. But we can leave Clive out. What about *us* ? Mary and Beth—and me ? Aren't *we* useless ? My sister Mary plays Mendelssohn and Bach and sings airs from Verdi and sentimental songs when people come to tea. She reads a little Dickens, a little Thackeray, less George Eliot ; and Beth, who's spiteful though, says she knows she wept over Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but too Well*. Beth makes excellent butter and good scones : she is a good plain cook, according to mother ; a plain good cook according to father. . . . Well, what have you to say to that ? ”

“ Tut, tut, my dear young lady, you talk too much . . . too much.”

“ Why shouldn't I ? ” She laughed again. “ I wasn't born in sixty-three for nothing. That, you know, was the year in which slavery was abolished.”

“ Tut, tut,” said John Furlow again, “ now who is talking about slavery ? ”

“ We are, of course. *Aren't* we slaves, Mary and Beth and I ? Slaves to a tyrannical father and a much more tyrannical tradition which assumes that women are fools. I think you might talk to father for me, Dr. Furlow. . . . That might help, you know.”

And as though she thought it really might she walked home elated. It was late afternoon : and beautiful in the sweet damp way that was characteristic of the summers just then as of others that have followed it. But Eve had no eye for the country and no love. Nothing touched her in the pageant of the afternoon : neither the rich harmony of colours nor the darkly tufted trees in the flat near fields ; not the mauve and green of a large potato-patch, the pink and blue and purple of the hedges nor the unharvested corn yellow against the high skyline. That, indeed, she looked at with a severely practical eye. "It *looks* healthy enough," she thought. But for once she forgot her hatred of the country ; forgot, as she walked through it, to look on the bitter face of her disappointment. Instead she found herself laughing at one of Jeremy's announcements ; a large printed page stuck crookedly on the wall of some cottage outhouse.

CLUNBURY HALL FARM

FOR SALE

BY ORDER OF JEREMY BENTLEY, ESQ.,

TWENTY-ONE PIGS, TWENTY-FOUR WELL-BRED
BEASTS. . . .

These fine distinctions of the stockyard made her laugh. She was still laughing as she walked on. "Twenty-one pigs. Twenty-four well-bred beasts. . . ."

Perhaps John Furlow did "talk" to Jeremy as Eve had requested him, but scarcely at any rate to Eve's purpose, for all of consolation her father had to offer her was that although she couldn't be a doctor she might quite easily, if she chose, become a doctor's wife.

"Marry that old man !" she said, deeply shocked. She had a natural fastidiousness strongly reinforced by the element of prig in her composition, but all the same she was pleased with herself for being quite-so deeply shocked as she certainly was. Jeremy laughed.

"Well, he wouldn't be here long to bother you, and he

might leave you all his money," he told her, and Eve laughed, not believing that old John Furlow had the least desire to marry her, and because the idea of marriage was fast becoming a little humorous. The prospects for matrimony, she thought, were surely a little thin—even if your mind was set on matrimony, as Eve's certainly was not. The young men of Clutton and Clunbury were beginning to fight as shy of Eve's braininess as of Beth's reputation. Eve, very sure that she didn't care for men, was horribly bored by those specimens who found their way into the drawing-room at Clunbury Hall, or with whom she polka'd and waltzed down its decarpeted length, and supposed that they were equally bored with her. She grew very tired of the phrases with which a new acquaintance opened a conversation, or acknowledged an introduction. They were so forlornly alike, so depressingly expected. "I hear you're very clever," was the simplest, most straightforward rendering, but sometimes it was tentatively playful. "I've just been hearing a dreadful thing about you," or, even worse, "I'm not clever, you know, or anything like that." When first she encountered one or the other Eve had been struck dumb, had floundered into a slough of verbal idiocy or sunk into a heavy sea of silence, so that the unfortunate young man must surely have gone home with the conviction that he had been wrongly informed. But later Eve learned to utter polite nothings, which, though hardly more intelligent, had at least a social value, so that one or two of the young men who liked the look of her might have allowed their interest to deepen if she had given them the ghost of encouragement. But she never did. With her mind fixed so intently upon something else these young men with their inane compliments only bored her. Did they think she was a fool? Why didn't they talk to her like an intelligent human being? Yet she wished she liked them better: she was so lonely these days she would have welcomed them as friends, if those had been the days of friendship between men and women. But they were not.

In addition to the young men of Clutton and Clunbury whom Judith asked to the house and for whom, in spite of

Jeremy's smiles, she took up her carpets in order that there might be dancing, there were also the young men who from time to time came home with Clive. Young and affable they all were, but none of them was inclined to talk to Eve or her sisters as they talked to Clive or her father. Eve's vanity was wounded because they never assumed she knew anything at all or took an interest in the world that interested them, even though they came armed with tales of her "braininess," thrust themselves upon her with some version of that idiotic phrase about "cleverness." It was, too, so obvious all the time (though not to Eve, whose vanity did not extend to her personal appearance) that they liked the look of her, that they never forgot the fact that she was a girl and an attractive one. Even Jeremy, these days, had come to a grudging admission of the fact that the word plain was scarcely accurate when applied to Eve. At twenty-two she was a tall, well-built girl with serious grey-blue eyes in a palely tinted face, wearing her bronze hair in such defiance of fashion that she managed entirely to elude the miserable epithet "smart," and at the same time to dodge all others that people tried to fling at her. For though she was neither pretty nor handsome, she was as unlike the angular strong-minded females of whom her father did not approve as she was unlike the featureless visions of femininity of whom he did. Eve's face had character, strength and a hint of reserves. She was marvellously quiet, wearing an air of pinioned wings, with a look in her eyes of one who dreamed dreams, saw visions.

Certainly, in those early days, she had admirers enough for all she seemed hardly to notice the fact. It was always Mary or Beth who came opening her eyes, not wholly accepting her statement that she had seen nothing at all, that they had seen too much, more than existed. But in the case of young Harry Dirx it was Clive. Harry, Clive said, heaven only knew why, was "dotty" about her. And "dotty" about her he remained to the end, so "dotty" that he weathered Eve's initial snub which might well have demolished him and his dottiness. For Harry, too, out of his nervous adoration, came stammering out that forlorn cliché; had babbled weakly that

he was not a bit "clever or anything like that," and Eve had raised her head and struck.

"So I perceive," she said, and turned her back on him.

But when next he came to Clutton he had forgiven her. He liked her as much as all that. Yet Eve, conscious that her family looked upon Harry's liking for her with favour; that her father hoped she would marry him and settle down to her "womanly duties" and forgetfulness of her dreams of a medical career, found it necessary to use the plainest means of conveying to the poor boy that his suit was hopeless. But having, as she thought, driven that well home, she surprised him by explaining, if not actually apologising for, the heaviness of the stroke with which the operation had been performed.

"You see," she said, "you don't know what it is. . . . Nobody stopped *you* from doing things. People don't, if you're a boy."

"I don't know that I wanted to do anything particularly," Harry said, stammering a little in his pleasure that Eve had condescended actually to talk to him, "I had my job chosen for me."

"You're like Clive. . . . Clive didn't care, much, either, about going into the Army or about anything else. I *do*, and because I'm a girl I'm told to stop at home and get married. Well, I've either got to let off steam by being rude to everybody or go mad. I expect you'd rather I were rude than mad, wouldn't you?"

"I'd like you, you know, whatever you were. Of course, I know I can't expect you to look at me."

"Now for goodness' sake, don't, or I shall begin all over again. You see, I don't believe in . . . love . . . and that sort of thing, and I don't intend to marry anybody, ever."

"Oh, I say . . . don't say that."

"But I mean it."

"Well, if ever you alter your mind."

"I never alter my mind," said Eve in her devastating fashion.

"Oh, I say, look here. . . ."

"But all the same, if you'll stop paying me silly compliments

... there's no reason why we shouldn't be friends." The hard self-confidence in her young voice merged, despite her efforts, into a yearning plea for companionship, for friendship. Harry, hoping impossible things, believing there was so much more for him, in that plea, than there was—for him or anybody else—was quite melted by it. They shook hands on their new understanding, on their promise of friendship that was destined to be nothing more than a promise.

For Harry, poor boy, was killed not many months later with Clive in some obscure fight over the annexation of Burma.

Long after the news had reached Clunbury Hall, long after it had been broken to Judith, Eve stood at her window staring out upon the slowly dying day. Above Jeremy's well-tilled fields a little moon shone palely. Beyond the home fields Solbury Hill was gathered up in a blue-grey shroud. The rooks cawed from the old, high trees about the house, not breaking, but only intensifying the silence, so that the world seemed wonderfully quiet and peaceful. It might almost have been that hearts do not break nor women weep for their dead.

But to Eve it was as though she stood at the window of her prison and acquiesced, for the first time, and with no passion at all, in the fact of her own incarceration. She knew, now, that she would never have the courage to leave her mother, who there in the next room had turned her face to the wall and wanted just then nothing that Eve or anybody else could give her. But even now, as always, Eve had thrown down her arms before that look of suffering on Judith's face.

Eve was beaten: beaten too near the ground to get any consolation as yet out of what later she called her martyrdom. She was just twenty-three, but her life, it seemed, was finished before it had begun. None of the things she wanted would ever come her way: she would do nothing with the years ahead. A long procession that appalled her, they came slowly over the brow of Time. She would stay there all her life, as her mother had done, as Mary and Beth were doing—she who hated the country, who had no eye for its natural beauties, cared nothing for her father's theories and experiments, and

whose pity for the agricultural labourer was swallowed up in scorn that he should so "put up with things." She despised everybody who "put up with things" and yet, after all her fighting, here she was, defeated. And here, defeated, she would stay. Would she give up all hope of escape or make absurd futile dashes after freedom as Beth still did? Would she become prim and correct, like Mary, *not wanting anything*, or would she turn like Beth, blindly, to the one thought, the liberating thought, of men? Would people talk about her presently, as now they talked about Beth? Was that what she was coming to? She shivered. There at the open window it was cold. . . .

Judith wept but little over Clive's death: the wound went too deeply for that, but very definitely the blow loosened her hold upon life, though people, impressed by Jeremy's more spectacular grief, remarked how much better Judith was "taking it." But Eve saw her mother's life as a terribly threadbare thing. To have nothing but your children, to put all your eggs in one basket! Why it wasn't even common sense.

They remained, to the end, these two, singularly apart, speaking different languages, for Eve hid her affection for her mother beneath so much else that Judith might be pardoned for so seldom catching a glimpse of it. Eve's feeling for her mother was the most agitating thing in her life and she distrusted it. To care too much for anyone, for anything, meant being hurt. Her life for the two years that followed Clive's death was one long effort to fortify that recognisably vulnerable spot. . . .

Judith was a little appalled by this surprising daughter of hers, who said with such strange unyouthful passion that women's lives revolted her. To be treated not as a human, but as a sexual being. . . . "I couldn't bear that," said Eve. Judith's life had never struck her as revolting and she wished Eve would not express herself quite so vehemently. Even now when she was so tired that nothing seemed any longer to matter she could not forget that she had been happy. She thought Eve was wrong to talk so scornfully of men, because she

believed that if you were a woman you couldn't get on without them. All the things that mattered to a woman came through them whether you liked it or not, which was why she found it so much harder to forgive Jeremy his unreasonableness to Mary and Beth than to forgive him his infidelities to herself. She thought Eve would suffer before she discovered this truth, but discover it eventually she certainly would.

And Eve laughed.

"Mother, darling, you're terribly old-fashioned," she said. "Can't you see that that's what's the matter with Mary and Beth—with Beth especially? They've been taught to believe that they'd have nothing save what they got through some man, and now because there isn't a man there isn't anything else either. 'Mother, don't you *see* you don't leave the old maids *anything at all*? We're just left to go to pieces like a Rhoda Broughton heroine. . . . Why aren't we given something to do . . . something to occupy our minds?'"

"You, at least, darling," said Judith in her gentle fashion, "need not have been an old maid, as you call it."

"Harry!" said Eve. "You think I'd have been better off to have married that poor boy! What would I have got out of it, save a baby, perhaps—for you to nurse?"

Eve couldn't imagine herself "in love" with anyone—kissing and being kissed. If she wanted love she did not want it in the extravagant fashion little Judith Dale had wanted it, and she set its boundaries very narrowly, edging away from the circumscribed life they offered her. But all the time she went on talking that thought of the little grandchild she would never see went up and down in her mother's mind.

Eve was twenty-four when old Doctor Furlow proposed to her, and she was most horribly and unbelievably disgusted. Neither could she have phrased her refusal very tactfully, for John Furlow complained to Jeremy that he had a couple of the most unmannerly daughters, from which it had to be inferred that Huldah had refused his hand with no more consideration for his feelings than had Eve. But Jeremy smiled, as though he knew how much Huldah must have enjoyed the situation, how much Eve must have hated it.

Later, however, thanks to Jeremy, it became an incident out of which she had emerged with considerable credit. For Jeremy took to teasing Eve about her elderly lover and roared with laughter when she said that the thought of him as a husband made her sick.

"Anyway," she added, "I couldn't marry anybody I didn't . . . care for."

Jeremy went on laughing.

"Oh, you'll never care for anybody but yourself, you know," he told her. "I shouldn't let that stand in your way. Old Furlow can't last much longer, and if you'd played your cards well he'd have left you all his money. What price the medical dream then, my girl, eh?"

That had never occurred to Eve, but she contrived to give Jeremy the impression that it had and that she had had sufficient nobility of character to withstand the temptation. Plenty of girls *would* have married old Furlow for his money, but not Eve Bentley.

"I couldn't do a thing like that," she said, "I should feel so mean. I'd hate to feel mean."

"Ah, you would," said Jeremy. "You're one of those who like to be on good terms with yourself. Still, it puts an end, doesn't it, to your browsings in the medico's library?"

Eve's gaze fell, for of course the browsings *were* ended. Jeremy's trump. . . .

Throughout the passage of that hot and droughty summer she grew clever at avoiding the old doctor when he came in to see her mother, visibly drooping there in the heat like the red roses at her window. Thinner than ever was Judith now; her face paler and more heavily shadowed, her great eyes seeming to look through and beyond you. No need to tell Eve she was dying: she knew it afresh every time she looked at her and wondered how, when the end came, she was going to bear it. But Jeremy didn't guess: the summer of eighty-seven, after all those rainy years, was a trying one, and Judith never could endure the heat. There was nothing definitely the matter with her. Old Furlow admitted that and Jeremy supposed he came so frequently because, the silly old fool,

he hoped to encounter Eve. But it was certainly Beth whom he saw and Beth whom Jeremy teased.

"The field's yours, my girl," he told her, "but can't you hurry the pace a bit? These daily visits are running me up a tidy bill, I'll be bound. Not that I grudge you the price of a husband, my dear. I quite recognise that your meritorious efforts deserve a little assistance."

Beth looked at him, hatred slipping over her face like a distorting mask.

"Thanks very much," she said.

Judith knew that voice she kept for her father—stark and stubborn, yet with a hint of things snapping and cracking—like dry wood beneath a pot.

"Please, Jeremy," she said.

And Eve thought, as she had thought before: "I shall go mad, I shall go mad. . . . I *must* get away."

But when she looked at her mother's face she knew she wasn't even going to try.

CHAPTER SIX

THE hot and drougthy summer crept along like a thing on broken wing. Eve, tired out by the heat and more tragically certain than ever that her mother was not going to get better when this terrible summer came to an end, grew pale and thin and irritable. Broad-minded people just then were writing to the papers to the effect that they thought the secular professions should be thrown open to women who were adequately qualified to fill them: and though the writers of these letters kept Eve sane, those two words—"adequately qualified"—sent whole seas of bitterness flowing over her soul. They reduced the whole of feminine existence to the question of £. s. d., for how, in the name of goodness, was one to get "adequately qualified" for anything at all unless one had money? She hardened her heart against her father, had no ear for his laments over ruined crops, and blamed him that she must stay here day after day doing nothing whatever that mattered, waiting in this horrible fashion for her mother to die—the one definite thing on an otherwise empty horizon.

Her bitterness was lost, however, on Mary and on Beth, both of whom must have made unsatisfactory audiences. For Mary, at thirty-two, wanted nothing whatever save that one day should succeed another. Life, such as it was, trickled out for her in a miserable stream. No use talking to Mary. And Beth spoke a different language . . . no use to talk of careers to Beth. It wasn't a career Beth wanted, but a husband, like every other woman, she told Eve, except Eve herself, who was obviously a freak. *Men!* What did they know of men who never met any? "You can't judge all men by father,"

Beth said, "and at least it isn't his fault we don't get married."

"But it was his fault you didn't marry Dave Rusthall."

"Not altogether. Dave could have waited." Beth spoke bitterly.

"Till you were twenty-one? Over three years. A long time for a farmer who wants sons."

"Well, he didn't get them," said Beth. Dave had six children, five of them girls, and Beth seemed to think that if he had waited she could have done better for him than that.

This sort of conversation shocked Mary, who thought her sisters "unladylike." Mary had taken to church work and to signing herself "Sacheverell-Bentley." It amused Jeremy.

Beth had no patience with Eve, who was full of ideas and talked such nonsense about women and what they wanted. As though *she* knew. And all that rubbish, too, about men. About men standing in the way. In the way of what? Precious little women would get in this world if it weren't for men! What woman worth her salt would want to be a doctor or a lawyer or anything else if she could get married and have a baby?

"But that's just it," Eve said, with her brutal, engaging directness. "You *aren't* going to get married and have babies. Neither am I or Mary. . . . So why shouldn't we do something else?"

"Because there isn't anything else worth doing," Beth said.

If Beth had no patience with Eve, Eve certainly had none with Beth, whose mind, so thinly draped, seemed to stand there stark and stripped beside the muffled-up minds of all the other people around her. (She would have excepted Eve's mind: it was not muffled-up, but Beth understood nothing whatever of its processes.) Ever so slightly Beth disgusted Eve, not because of that naked, that practically naked mind, but of its conclusions. To Eve they were hopelessly astray. There *were* other things worth doing. And you *could* judge, in essentials, by father. Men were like that—about women.

They didn't seem able to help themselves. So she reasoned, seeing her father merely as the upholder of the faith of his fathers, of the ancient Sacheverell whom Queen Anne had so surprisingly rewarded. Women were here for but one purpose, and from it they should not be deflected. If they failed of that purpose they failed altogether. Beth believed that, whilst Eve saw it merely as part of an enormous pretence—the pretence that apart from men women had no lives at all. *No lives at all.* Oh, but it wasn't true. Why didn't women think these things out for themselves?

Well, *she* would *never* believe it. And she didn't *hate* men. At least, she wouldn't. She would be reasonable and level-headed and—please, dear Lord—good-tempered. But underneath she was growing afraid—afraid of the thing that was coming to her, the thing she might grow to be. She clutched for safety at her sense of humour, her sense (even more precarious) of proportion. A thing wasn't so bad if you could laugh at it sometimes. But if you laughed too much they might think you no longer cared . . . that you had forgotten : that you no longer wanted to escape.

Summer crept at last beneath the cool wings of Autumn. September came, and Jeremy, ruthlessly bent on economy, dismissed his bailiff and let Eye Farm to a man called Blunsdon, a stranger to the neighbourhood and popularly supposed to be a widower, since he had brought his sister to keep house. Eve got used to hearing her father speak of him with enthusiasm as a man who could see several inches before his nose. Once or twice in the early days of his tenancy Eve had caught sight of him up at Clunbury Hall, a tall grave-looking man of something under forty, who had had very little to say to Eve, seemed, indeed, scarcely to notice her. Evidently Beth (busy about the farm and in the dairy) must have seen him much more frequently, and if he had said as little to her as to Eve it must have meant a good deal more.

Blunsdon had been some six months at Eye when the news leaked out that he was not a widower at all, but the husband of a woman who had been taken, five years ago, to an asylum, where she had been ever since and where she was expected to

remain. There had been a child which had died (mercifully, so the gossips said, though not to Blunsdon) in infancy. Eve, not in the least interested in Joe Blunsdon and the things which concerned him, passed the facts with no more than the slightest of references, for no one's troubles just then were half so important to Eve Bentley as her own. Her ego was the centre from which her imagination radiated, to which, ultimately, it returned. Joe Blunsdon's troubles were five years old, and no affair of hers or of Clutton's, anyway. So much for Joe Blunsdon.

Afterwards Eve remembered what Beth had said: "But supposing they *aren't* five years old? I mean, supposing he wanted to marry again?"

Marriage! Beth thought of nothing else! Eve was unconcerned. "Well, he can't," she said shortly. "I should think once was enough, anyhow!"

Beth said nothing, but a week or so later developed the first illness of her life. Old John Furlow was away, but Eve, taking the reins into her own hands as she always did when things had to be decided, sent for the young man who was acting in his stead and incidentally setting all Clutton and Clunbury by the ears. His methods, the gossips said, were too "modern," his manners bad and his outspokenness extremely offensive to a generation which had become used to the polite paraphrases of a John Furlow.

When Eve followed him out on to the little dark landing outside Beth's bedroom and asked him if he would send her sister a tonic, his "outspokenness" did not shock her, but it certainly startled her.

"The only tonic your sister wants," he told her, "is a husband. I suppose I ought to say that to your father and not to you?"

Eve, strangely glad of the dimness of the landing, shook her head, managed to indicate that she could stand it, on the whole, rather better than her father. But even through the gloom she could feel this young man's eyes upon her and she wondered why they made her feel that he despised women—that he thanked God, fasting, upon his knees, that He had

made him a man. She was surprisingly nonplussed to discover that it required effort to answer his inquiries in the cold detached manner in which they were made, and every word seemed to deepen within her that odd sense she had long had that to be born a woman was an initial disadvantage from which one never really recovered.

With the young man gone Eve looked at the disturbing fact he had left with her, and disliked it extremely. Marriage as a physiological necessity? There must be books on the subject . . . books that she could have got hold of in Dr. Furlow's library, where, of course, she couldn't go any longer. It surprised and alarmed her because with that sense of deprivation there was mixed up now a distinct sense of relief. Disturbed as yet only by her restless questing mind, supremely unconscious of her body, she now grew a little frightened to think of what your body could do to you. . . . For in the face of her urgent desire to believe nothing of the sort she knew that what that very unorthodox young man had said of Beth was true. . . .

Yet she was cool enough when Jeremy inquired why Beth must have a doctor and what the matter was.

"He's sending her a tonic," she said, "and she's to do more walking. She ought, he says, to see people . . . not only women. And she ought to get married."

"Married!" said Jeremy. "I could have told him that. There are two more of you in like case. Did he propose to send along a husband with his bottle of physic? P'raps he fancies one of you himself?"

Eve hated him for repeating this puerile joke to her mother. As though he couldn't allow her simple statement of Beth's need of a tonic to stand! As though he couldn't see how she worried about Beth as it was—how she worried about all of them!

However, Beth got up and went for her walks with a strange docility, since Beth had never been fond of walking. It was not until much later that Eve discovered what must, even then, have been happening, who it was she was meeting. . . . At the time it was sufficient that Beth grew well again, so

that Eve was free to let her mind sink back into the Slough of Despond where lay her cherished idle dreams.

But presently something happened which dragged it back to the surface. For months there was no time at all to think of herself or what she was going or not going to make of her life. Everything was swallowed up in an interested and agitated contemplation of what Beth had already made of hers.

It was May, and Jeremy had gone off to the Exhibition in Paris when the talk began, and Eve, hearing it for the first time, wondered how it was that she had so entirely missed the things with which it was concerned. But missed them she certainly had. Never once had it occurred to her that Beth and Blunsdon saw anything more of each other than his occasional visits to Clunbury Hall Farm made inevitable, neither did she at all connect Beth's illness with the sudden revelation of the fact that Blunsdon was a married man. As it afterwards transpired the attraction between the two had been instantaneous, and Beth's collapse seems to have followed upon Joe's corroboration of the gossip and his decision that their friendship should come to an end. Yet that could not have amounted to very much, since Beth herself confessed later that she was meeting him on those walks the young doctor with the anachronistically frank tongue had recommended: that she used to go up to Eye to tea. Blunsdon's sister, who kept house for him, liked Beth and apparently encouraged the friendship, so that everything conspired to smile upon Beth's schemes. Even so, she must have been a good deal cleverer about the preliminaries than she had ever been before, since that was March and here, when the first rumours moved abroad, it was May.

Popular sympathy, so far as Eve could gather, inclined to be with the culprits: with Joe because it was conceded that he "must have his feelings, like any other man," and with Beth because it was open knowledge that Jeremy had queered so many of the pitches upon which the matrimonial game, so far as Beth Bentley was concerned, could have been advantageously played. It was not that the flannelled Victorian

mind excused Beth so much as that it disapproved of Jeremy, who had a local reputation for bullying and pride. As for Beth herself, she gave nothing away. She cared nothing for Clutton and its clatter of tongues. At thirty, for those who admired her bold coarse type, she was undoubtedly an attractive woman. That she had been born completely without imagination must have told considerably in her favour.

Certainly the plea of nerves, of collapse, was never put forward. Beth, at least, had known what she was about, and if Joe cared for her he couldn't have had much chance. Not that he ever put it like that; it was Beth who owned up. Beth had no shame, no regrets; whatever happened she would never, Eve felt, have either, for which, a little reluctantly perhaps, she admired her. And it was Eve who, a week after Jeremy's departure, quite accidentally made the discovery that on the night of a neighbouring fair, Beth had not slept at home. Not only that (which since the sisters made their own beds might well have passed unnoticed), but she didn't even take the trouble to get home in time for breakfast. Cool and quiet she walked into the house when that meal was disappearing from the table; came straight into the sitting-room where Eve was arranging flowers. Of such things was Eve's life composed. She'd go on doing them, she supposed, when she was grey-headed.

"Where's Mary?" Beth asked.

"In the dairy," Eve told her.

"And mother?"

"Not up. She's not so well this morning." Eve's voice went flat as it always did when she spoke of her mother, these days. She hated answering her sisters' questions: hated them because they couldn't see for themselves what she could see, what she couldn't help seeing, what she would have given the world not to see.

Beth shut the door, pulled a chair from its place against the wall, and sat down.

"I suppose you want to know where I've been?" she said.

"I don't," said Eve, "but I suppose I ought to ask you."

"I'll save you the trouble. I went to Imberford Fair with Joe Blunsdon, and I spent the night with him at Huish Priors. What have you got to say to that?"

"Nothing," said Eve, which was true.

"Shocked, I suppose?"

"No," said Eve again, which, however, was less true.

There was a little pause, then Eve said a cruel thing.

"You might have waited," she said, "until mother was dead! You wouldn't have had to wait long!"

Beth said nothing for a long time. Eve went on with the business of her flowers.

"I didn't know," said Beth presently. "Are you sure?"

Eve nodded. When she spoke it was not of her mother. "You know, of course, that Blunsdon can't marry you?"

"He would if he could. I suppose you don't believe that?"

"Why shouldn't I believe it? You'd make Joe Blunsdon an excellent wife."

"Thanks," said Beth. "Look here, Eve . . . I don't want to appear as a poor seduced female, or anything of that kind. I'm not."

No need to tell Eve that. She finished with her flowers and turned to put the vases into position.

"You know what'll happen to Blunsdon?" she asked.

"Father won't have him here. He'll have to go."

"There are other farms," said Beth.

Eve turned and looked at her. There was an extraordinary lack of self-consciousness about her and no shame at all. What she had done she evidently considered worth while. It was no light escapade, lightly undertaken, and whatever its consequences it wouldn't be Beth who was going to whine about them. But Eve couldn't see, quite, what Beth was playing for. Had she trapped Blunsdon into compromising her so that she could batter down his decision that there must be an end to things? Or had they settled to fling in their lot together and been betrayed by their passion and opportunity? From that thought Eve's cool flesh recoiled surprisingly: so that

she half-hoped it was cold daring calculation upon Beth's part. Anything rather than to be betrayed like that, from within. But Beth didn't say.

"There'll be a scandal, I'm afraid, Eve, sooner or later," she said presently. "I hope you won't mind—very much—if people talk."

"We're talked about now," said Eve, "if it comes to that."

"Oh, in *that* way, yes. . . . The whole place is sorry for us. We're known as the Old Maids of Clunbury Hall. . . . Everybody knows that Mary wanted to marry old Hawkins's clerk and wasn't allowed to: everybody knows that I wanted to marry Dave Rusthall and wasn't allowed to. . . ."

"And who am I credited with wanting to marry?"

"Nobody . . . you're only credited with being queer . . . *different*."

"I see," said Eve, "people are sorry for us."

"Well, we're sorry for ourselves, aren't we?"

"No, I've even got over that," Eve told her.

Beth stared at her.

"I can't make you out," she said. "Haven't you ever been in love?"

"No," said Eve bluntly.

"But didn't you ever think it would be good to be married and have a home of your own—and children?"

"And get away from father?" Eve laughed. Yet there was something in her which revolted at this idea of marriage as an *escape*. No, it wasn't marriage her thoughts had dwelt upon—it was a career.

"There was young Dirx. You might have married him. He was a nice enough boy."

"I know," said Eve, "but he never mattered."

"And John Furlow."

"He was *old*," said Eve, "dreadfully old. . . ."

"All the same, there was a time when I'd have had him, if he'd asked me," said Beth. "Father was right there." The faint look of disgust on Eve's face deepened a little. Even she hadn't realised that Beth's case was as desperate as all

that. Disgust was all about her ; she seemed splashed with it. She said something trivial and escaped.

For a long time afterwards Beth sat there looking out through the open window across the perfection of the summer morning. Even though she hated Clunbury she loved the country : she was very near to it, the sweet earth a part of her. She loved the turquoise of the morning sky : the faint green of the trees, the green-gold garment of Spring that lay over fields and garden. She was almost done with Clutton—she'd not be there much longer. But in at the open window there floated to her now the scents of the garden, of cherry and apple bloom, of lilac, sweetbriar and hawthorn. And suddenly another came and wiped them out—the scent of Joe's tweed coat as she had lain with her face against it last night, driving up through the dark woods from Imberford. The memory filled her with a rare penetrating sense of happiness, so new, so ecstatic as to be overwhelming. She covered her face with her hands and sat there weeping.

The story, of course, leaked out. Before many days were past all the village knew that Beth Bentley had spent a certain night out of her own bed, and all the village was perfectly certain that they knew in whose bed she had spent it. They had been seen, Beth and Blunsdon, at the fair ; had been seen to leave together in Blunsdon's high trap. There were even folk who knew to which inn the trap had been driven. Huish Priors was less than three miles beyond Imberford : Blunsdon was a new-comer and not very well known as yet in the district ; but he must have been better known than he imagined. Besides, to drive five miles in the broad daylight, not to make any attempt to get into Clutton before the world was awake. . . . They'd asked for trouble. . . .

The talk, though no hint of it came as yet to Judith, was open and unashamed, so that Mary, Victorian to her soul, could scarcely be induced to show her face in the village. To Mary, Beth was merely a bad woman ; but with Eve it was rather that what her sister had done affronted something in herself which she held precious. Eve was afraid of passion, afraid of all deep feeling, and her colder flesh edged away

from this manifestation of warmth and desire as years ago it had done from her mother's attitude to Jeremy's unfaithfulness. Having long ago come to the conclusion that women were "decenter" than men, she hated Beth for having proved her wrong, for having "let down" her sex. But Beth, so she comforted herself, wasn't representative: you couldn't judge by Beth, who was happy if her body was appeased. Eve turned in misery from this picture of women led captive to their fundamental instincts: for her body had so far left her alone. It was the unsatisfied demands of her mind, of her spirit, of what she would never have dreamed of calling her soul, that tortured Eve. They shouted no scandal from the housetops, but weren't they, perhaps, quite as difficult to bear?

"What does it matter what people say?" she demanded of the shrinking Mary. "And their talk's nothing fresh." She threw Beth's phrase at her, like vitriol from a bottle. "The old maids of Clunbury Hall!" Well, what did it matter that one of them, a maid no longer, had given them something fresh to talk about?

But the talk, if it did not languish and die, at least crawled under cover after Blunsdon had fought Ted Bailey for suggesting that he had let himself be seduced. It might have been true, as Bailey declared, that a man could have had Beth Bentley for the asking; but it certainly wasn't true, and never had been, of Ted Bailey. The talk, however, with a black eye on Bailey and a cut cheek on Blunsdon to give it point, emerged into the open upon Jeremy's return, when the storm burst in fury.

Eve, her head up before the blast, found excuses for Beth's action, though her disgust at it persisted. She thought her father, as he had so often thought her, unbearably self-righteous. Beth, it seemed to her, had taken what, years ago, Jeremy had denied her: the thing she wanted most. What, she asked, had he to offer her—to offer any of them—instead? And still Jeremy's fury raged and Eve's unbowed head revolved but one miserable thought. Nothing, nothing: he offers us nothing. Our lives are running away like water under a bridge.

Jeremy did not spare Judith. It was not in Jeremy to spare anybody, even the pale phantom that Judith had become. And after Beth, in the midst of Jeremy's anger, had gone off quietly to Blunsdon, Eve, trying to make things better, made them worse. Beth, she explained, was like her father, and Judith's look of shocked amazement stayed in her memory for days.

Blunsdon remained proof against Jeremy's anger, against his oaths and threats, and continued to live there at Eye with Jeremy's daughter in what Jeremy and everybody else called open sin. Beth, said Blunsdon, knew her own mind and she had been a woman these many days despite her father's refusal to recognise the fact. Blunsdon's views on the matrimonial laws must have taken Jeremy's breath away, as, too, his declaration that he cared nothing for church and parson, that he could get along without the blessing of either. Jeremy, who wanted to knock him down, must have realised how infinitely more satisfactory it would be to turn him out of his excellently-tended farm. And he swore because he couldn't do it till September.

Eye, once so desperately, so agonisingly near to Clutton, now seemed to Judith like the outpost of the world. Twice she walked there against Jeremy's orders through the fatiguing humidity of the late May weather, and twice Joe Blunsdon drove her home in his high trap and lifted her down, spent and drooping, into Eve's strong arms. She never went again. She never went anywhere again. She died a week later, before another summer had scarcely begun.

Death came very quietly, finding her alone in the great bed in which she had slept for so many years at Jeremy's side, where she had dreamed her dreams and suffered that they might come true. Outside the first roses were abloom on Clunbury wall, and beneath the long shafts of the warm afternoon sun the hawthorn dropped straightly to the ground. The last thing her eyes must have rested upon was Solbury Hill, blue and gold in the distance, or the pale ash tree that tapped with delicate green fingers at her open window. She must just have closed her eyes and shut these sweet things out

for ever. There down the dark street of Death she moved serenely now, a faint smile on her face.

"As if," thought Eve, who came up later and found her, "as if she knows that it isn't death which has cheated her, but life."

BOOK II

EVE

CHAPTER ONE

NOTHING ever annoyed Eve Bentley quite so much as the discovery that her father, faithless to Judith in her lifetime was rewarding her in death by a faithfulness wholly unlooked for. If his amours in the past had disgusted her there were times when his lack of them now disgusted her far more ; for, supposing her father to be the sort of man who could not live without a woman, she had hoped that his early remarriage would give her the chance of escape for which she had waited so long. She was not grateful to him for showing her so plainly that at last he was delivering himself from the tyranny of the flesh.

In the September which followed her mother's death Beth went off into Lincolnshire with Blunsdon. Her fame lived on in Clutton. "Excellent at butter-making and husband-hunting." Jeremy, who heard so much, must have heard that, too.

In the Spring of eighty-nine her son was born, and Eve left Clutton to stay with her. Eve was twenty-six, and this was the first time she had been more than ten miles from home. . . . Mary, to whom none of the minor pleasant things of life ever happened, had nothing to show for the month of her sister's absence, save a spot in the middle of her forehead, a gap in her upper jaw and a bowing acquaintance with the dentist responsible for this latter unsightly addition to her

physical appearance. He was a new-comer who lived over at Huish, so Mary informed her; young, considerate, very friendly. And of course father had been very unpleasant. . . .

Eve, however, was less interested in the dentist than in his handiwork. "Well, you'd better have that gap filled in," she said. "Couldn't those teeth have been stopped?"

Mary said they could not, and that she couldn't bear the thought of false teeth.

"All right, if you like the gap better," Eve said, and lost interest in the subject.

Then Jeremy, too, threw the young man dentist at her head. She did not like it any the better that he arrived via the heads of her two sisters. "I suppose you've heard that Mary has a new acquaintance?" he asked her in the ingratiatingly offensive fashion he used when speaking of Mary and of Beth.

"I have heard that she has had to pay a visit to the dentist," she said.

Jeremy laughed. "He hasn't done much for her, do you think?"

"He relieved her, I understand, of the toothache."

"And of a couple of teeth." Jeremy laughed again.

"Pity Beth was in such a hurry," he said. "If she'd waited she might have seduced the young man dentist instead of Blunsdon. He has the advantage of not being married already, though doubtless Elizabeth Bentley was hardly the woman to see much of an advantage in that."

"But Beth's teeth are so good. She could scarcely have hoped to meet the dentist unless you'd asked him to dinner and introduced us all."

"Your sister was in the habit, was she, of waiting for introductions? Anyway, I make you a present of the dentist."

Eve smiled. "Thank you," she said. "I am not in need of his services at the moment. However, if you can manage to achieve the toothache. . . ."

Jeremy grinned, either because it was a habit of his to grin when he was in a bad temper, or because he knew that the dentist's chair is what all mankind eventually comes to.

Nevertheless, it was Eve and not Jeremy who ultimately achieved the toothache. And she was not pleased about it, for this was the first touch of physical pain which had come her way, and there was nothing whatever in her philosophy to help her to bear it. A couple of restless nights sent her into Clunbury on the day when, so Mary informed her, the young man dentist came in from Huish.

A little house at the foot of the High Street displayed his nameplate: Frank Norman, L.D.S. (London), and Eve sat in his sitting-room looking at a lot of astonishingly up-to-date magazines until the door opened and the young man himself looked in upon her.

To anybody but Eve the thought would have occurred that he was badly dressed, that his tie quarrelled with his suit and that his trousers shrieked aloud for a night in a press. But Eve, being Eve, noticed no more than that he was tall and that he smiled when she said, "I've come about a tooth," as though he wished to remark that that was what folk usually came about and as though he rather wished it were not.

One visit to a dentist is very like another, and as Eve sat there in this young man's horrible chair, doing all the things he required of her, Mary's "kind and considerate" young man became only a bending face, a pair of gentle hands, a solicitous voice that uttered quite reasonable things to which she was in a position to make only queer unintelligible noises in reply. It was not until much later that she had any sense whatsoever of him as a human being, when she stood there drawing on her gloves and her eyes took in the width of back presented to her as its owner stooped to write in a ledger of ridiculous proportions, as though, she thought, a little compassionately, he expects to be here for ever.

"What name is it, please?" asked the owner of the back.

Years since Eve had been asked that question. Everybody in Clutton and Clunbury knew who she was. "Bentley. Eve Bentley. And will you send the bill, please, to my father, Jeremy Sacheverell Bentley, Clunbury Hall?"

"Surely I saw somebody of that name quite recently?"

"My sister. You relieved her of two front teeth."

"*And* a bad abscess." The young man smiled. "Do please credit me with that."

"Oh, doubtless she prefers the gap to the pain."

"Wouldn't you?"

Eve smiled. "I might try to," she said. Her teeth were her one vanity. She would hate to have had bad teeth. "But that gap isn't really pretty."

"Nor really necessary. . . . S-a-c-ch. . . ." He looked round helplessly at Eve, who came to his assistance. Completed, the name seemed to have associations that went back farther than Mary and her abscess. "Wasn't there somebody, once, in history? . . ."

"Yes, in Queen Anne's day. My great-great-great-great grandfather. I forget how many 'greats.'"

"He objected, didn't he, to dissenters?"

"And to women."

The young man finished with his ledger and turned and looked at her. "By Jove!" he said. "Funny people there are in the world, aren't there?"

Mary's phrase came back to Eve. "Very friendly, very kind. . . ." Very friendly, certainly. Eve took a mental jerk backwards, said good afternoon in the prim fashion that was apt to descend upon her, these days, like a blight, and took her departure.

Frank Norman watched her from the window. . . .

Afterwards he explained himself to himself by saying to somebody else: "A girl called Bentley came to have a tooth stopped to-day. Daughter of that man Sacheverell Bentley over at Clunbury. Weren't we hearing something about him recently? Descendant, apparently, of that old Johnny in William the Third's reign—or was it Queen Anne's?—who got into trouble over. . . . Oh, you wouldn't know, though. History wasn't your strong point. But what worries me is not that the Bentleys had an ancestor who's in history, but that *she's* in art—and I can't remember where."

"Art isn't my strong point, either," said the "somebody," who happened to be Frank's sister, and as she didn't add:

"What is she like?" Frank's attempt at self-explanation languished and died.

And that, but for the Clutton Library, might well have been the end of it. Eve Bentley went to the library regularly, and she and Frank encountered each other there once or twice and exchanged no more than a merely formal greeting until that morning when he waited for her at the door and remarked: "Our ways lie, I think, in the same direction."

Idiotic to suggest that they didn't. Eve did not suggest it. They went out together in the sun.

He looked at her, and though there was still something teasingly familiar about her profile, something particularly about the nose and chin, he was worried less by it now than when he had seen her first in his surgery. "It's the hat. The hat modernises her. She never ought to wear a hat. And this one's so ugly." His thoughts dithered and rambled. "Women's hats are all ugly. Why does any woman wear a hat?" He recalled his attention with something of an effort. They were talking of novels—of the novels of Mr. Hardy.

They didn't agree over Mr. Hardy. They didn't agree over life, but life and Mr. Hardy together certainly brought them a good deal closer to each other, so that they were quite regretful, the pair of them, when they arrived at the little footpath which went up through the dark woods from Clutton through Imberford to Huish.

"The first really intelligent conversation I've ever had," thought Eve, as she walked homeward.

That was the beginning of it, for they met continually after that, though perhaps it was a little surprising that a young man whose books flourished the insignia of Mudie should find it necessary to come so frequently to the Library at Clunbury where there were never any books you really wanted to read. You had to read something. Eve saw books as the only occupation in life from which you secured anything for yourself at all. She did not care for them in the way she was already discovering Frank Norman cared for them. She read simply to occupy her mind, caring nothing for the trend of English literature and interested in no particular writer.

Yet it was a sentence of Frank's that had nothing whatever to do with literature that carried their friendship a step further. They had been talking of the education of women, and he had said, "There's a good time coming for women, you know, and coming quite soon," and because she smiled he added, "Is there anything against your believing that?"

"Only that it doesn't help," she said.

"Why not?"

"How does it help you to remember when you are hungry that somebody else won't be hungry to-morrow?"

Then, looking at her, he had said the thing that stuck in her mind. "Ah, yes, of course, meantime there's a generation going to the wall—some part of a generation, anyway."

A generation going to the wall. . . . She thought his phrase admirable. She had gone to the wall. And Mary. And Beth, but for her audacity, her courage to take what she wanted. Denied—by circumstance or temperament—the things of Yesterday, reaching out vain hands for the things of To-morrow. And between Yesterday and To-morrow, To-day. If the things of Yesterday sufficed, as they had sufficed for Beth, well and good. If they did not, where were you? Against the wall—crushed, flat, hopeless, bitter, getting nothing. . . .

She thought he was sorry for her when he invited her out to Huish to meet his sister. "You'll like her—she's going in for medicine. Why not come on a Saturday and let us exhibit our river tricks? They're really quite pretty."

So began Eve Bentley's happy friendship with Frank and Maud Norman. From the first she saw a good deal more of Maud than she did of her brother, for Maud was on holiday with time to spare, and Frank was at work which took him far afield. And when he was present he seemed content merely to sit in a corner with a pipe, laconic of speech, throwing in no more than a word here and there to refresh his sister's memory when he thought it needed it and watching Eve from under quiet brows, as though it interested him just to look at her. And he saw now why her head had always seemed familiar to him. In profile, save that her red hair was less smooth and drooped less over her ears, it was surprisingly like di Predis'

Beatrice D'Este. With a rope of pearls twisted in her hair. . . .

And somewhere about that time Eve must have said to Maud, "I like your brother. He's so sensible. . . ."

No one more surprised than Eve when some months later Frank asked her to marry him. And no one less surprised than Frank when she refused him.

CHAPTER TWO

FRANK and Maud Norman had formed, with their father, now dead, a curiously united trio, bound together by what all the other branches of the clan Norman considered to be their outrageous heresies.

John Norman, Frank's father, had been the only son of Everard, the head of one of the oldest legal practices in the City of London. His sister, Blanche, a tall, serene creature, made beautifully to pattern like every other Norman, had early lamented an inability in her brother to appreciate what Fate had done for him, and though her lamentations produced no effect upon John they had confirmed her intention of marrying a man who suffered from no such disability. Accordingly at nineteen she was trifling with jam : at twenty-one had married soap. It was when the claims of jam were in the ascendant that her brother refused a junior partnership in the family concern, went off to Liverpool and there set up as a Poor Man's Lawyer. Quite possibly old Everard Norman did not believe that the poor man was entitled to legal assistance : certainly he did not believe that his only son should be sacrificed to any poor man who ever lived. However, a few months after his arrival in Liverpool John met Stephanie Muir and married her with the precipitancy with which in those days he did most things. Blanche, interrupting the triflings with jam, went down to Liverpool and reported that Stephanie had money of her own, but ideas of spending it every scrap as strange as John's. "Wrong-headed, terribly wrong-headed, but likeable" the Normans said of her, but were yet startled when Frank's hurried and somewhat unexpected appearance upon the scene produced no change either in her outlook or

choice of menage. In the autumn of the following year, in the midst of the Liverpool Cotton Famine, Stephanie's daughter was born, and two days after Maud opened her eyes upon the world Stephanie closed hers for ever.

Blanche, to whom blood was always—a little inconveniently—thicker than water, interrupted her honeymoon with the soap magnate to come to that little house of mourning in what she called a Liverpool slum. And she was angry that Stephanie was dead, insisted that Stephanie ought not to have died, that if she had done her duty and stayed at home instead of running about looking after other people she would not have died. She hated the starving poor in Liverpool for whom her sister-in-law, so she said, had sacrificed her life. . . .

John did not hate them, but he could not bear to see them. He turned his back on Liverpool and returned to London, taking with him his two babies and Stephanie's little fifteen-year-old maid. A month later he took up that long-delayed partnership in the family concern and the eagle, they thought, was chained at last.

But not very securely, they found. Marne House, Bayswater, in which he established a housekeeper to keep little Martha Goss in countenance, speedily became the meeting-place, as John's father saw it, of all the disorderly minds in the neighbourhood, so that it was never safe to go there for fear of what you might encounter. John went still to his "queer" societies: still subscribed to their funds, still conducted their cases at law, still suffered the visitations of the poor and needy, and with his wife's fortune opened and endowed a *crèche* in Notting Hill for the children of working women. It was in this atmosphere that Frank and Maud Norman had grown up, and though it angered Blanche Forrest almost beyond endurance, she continued to come to the little house in Bayswater, though she would not expose her children to its corroding atmosphere of ideas. Upon the one occasion when she had tried the experiment Rosalind Forrest, finding Frank, as she said later, a "sweaty horror" (he had just come in from a game of football), rolled herself up inside her beautiful clothes and turned her back on him. Later, her brother and Frank

came to fisticuffs upon the drawing-room floor, and Rosalind had cried and begged to be taken home again. She was seventeen when next he met her, he three years older, and by then she was begging for nothing.

Blanche Forrest was deeply shocked when Frank had declared his intention of being a dentist—a thing no Norman had ever been. Having beautiful teeth of her own she considered it was somehow the fault of other people if they had not; a disgusting fault, certainly, but not one which any Norman should occupy himself in remedying. "Teeth!" she said in horror. "I thought it was *books* you liked!" "It is," said Frank, and seemed to think that was the complete answer. "Messing about with other people's mouths," his aunt went on. "Oh, my dear boy, you'll hate it. Why don't you be a doctor, if you really want to do that sort of thing?"

She thought it quite respectable to have a doctor in the family until she heard that Maud proposed to oblige her. "All this business about bodies," she said then. "Not at all nice, my dear, for a woman, believe me! And you'll have such an *unpleasant* time! The opposition! Oh, my dear, you've no idea. . . . The men will *never* consent. So horrid, if you are a woman, to have to fight!" ("Not it!" said Maud, "I love fighting, Aunt Blanche.") And Aunt Blanche went on: "You're like your mother. . . . I can see that. The ordinary woman's life isn't good enough for you." ("It isn't *enough*," said Maud.) "Well, you're making a bad mistake, my dear. A woman needs a husband and children. If she doesn't get them she pays for it in the end." That was the sort of thing Aunt Blanche came and said—the sort of thing she thought it her duty to come and say to John and Stephanie's children—as a counterblast to the dreadful heresies they imbibed at home.

But John and Stephanie's self-willed children were more than a match for their aunt and had their own way. Frank entered upon his "ridiculous" profession (taking a medical degree with his dental), and three years later Maud, having very carefully chosen her father, found no difficulty in getting

herself sent to the School of Medicine recently founded by Sophia Jex-Blake.

It was during their student days that Maud and Frank really became intimate with their cousins, when Blanche Forrest had a house up the river and felt it her duty to invite poor John's children for week-ends in the summer. What she did not know was that Rosalind and Frank saw quite as much of each other when the summer days were over, for Rosalind took to coming alone to the little house in Bayswater where "no one knew how to live properly," protesting that she did it out of affection for her Uncle John—signs of which, however, according to that gentleman, were entirely lacking upon those few occasions when she timed her visits to catch him at home. . . .

In the summer of eighty-eight John Norman had died. Blanche Forrest that afternoon had come to tea and had stayed on to see her brother when he came in from the City. While she sat there in his little drawing-room he must have let himself in with his key, sat down on the old oak settle and quietly died there. Blanche coming impatiently down the stairs had found him there, his head fallen a little to one side, his gloves and his evening paper still clasped in his hand.

Afterwards she supposed that it was fitting her brother should have died like that, out there in the porch, whilst you waited for him to come in to tea. He had sprung his death upon them as he had sprung everything else; you never knew what John Norman would do next. Blanche was conscious that she would hate to die like that, that she would hate to die at all, and that, more particularly, she would have hated to die just then. For Rosalind had just become engaged to the new Lord Wroxeter whom she had known for the past year as the impecunious Lovat Stern, with two cousins standing between him and his inheritance. Three months later they were married, and Rosalind came no more to the little house in Bayswater.

So here, in the summer of eighty-nine, was Blanche Forrest, her resplendency a trifle dimmed by her memories; her satisfaction in her new position as the mother of the beautiful

Lady Wroxeter a little chilled by the dews of mortality. And here was Frank, already a little regretful that he had allowed his father's death and that truncated affair with his cousin to drive him out of London. And here was Maud, very glad that they had, since they had given her the chance to come and spend a quiet holiday with him before she went off to Dublin on a midwifery course.

"Three months there," she said, "and three months in Paris—under Peon, perhaps, or Apostoli. That would be better than six months in Dublin with the L.M. at the end of it."

"P'raps Linda will ask me to tea," she said to her brother on the eve of her departure. "Wroxeter Towers is only a few miles out of Dublin. . . . Or do you think she regards a woman doctor as an indecency, as her mother does?"

"Probably." Frank did not rise to this sort of bait, and Maud wondered, as she had wondered a hundred times before, just how far that old affair with Linda Forrest had gone.

It was nine months since Linda Forrest, spoiled, trivial, callous, fair, fluffy and very pretty, had become Rosalind, Lady Wroxeter. It was nearly twelve since Frank had seen her, and somehow the quiet air with which he leaned suddenly forward and knocked out his pipe seemed to suggest that he didn't really mind if it were twelve hundred. He refilled his pipe and sat there, adding nothing to this talk of his cousin, but regretting with a profundity that was a little startling, the irrevocability of things done, things suffered and believed. Already the reality of Eve Bentley was forcing upon his attention a sense of the shadow Linda had become; had revealed to him with somewhat disconcerting clarity the fact that he had forgotten because he was never intended to remember. Fading already, Eve's coming had wiped out memories of Linda from his mind as if a sponge had been passed over it. The last traces of Linda's occupation had been removed, and in her place sat Eve Bentley, serene, detached, unconcerned. Terribly unconcerned, Frank thought.

To Eve, so much less interested in men and their careers than in women and theirs, the whole of Frank's adult existence seemed, in the light of Maud's, to have resolved itself into a

polite knocking at doors politely opened—a prosaic enough business to one fascinated by Maud's trick with a foot and a door ever so slightly ajar. Nothing that Frank had ever done, that he was or ever might be, could interest her as did Maud's stories of fights and faction in Edinburgh and Glasgow. He knew this: was perfectly cognisant of the fact that she remained sedately unaware of the emotions she had aroused in him, yet there were times when he wanted to twist her round by the shoulder and shock her into some sort of consciousness of his masculinity and of her own femininity. She had no sense whatever of her power, no thought of it, and never in his life had he met a woman so supremely unconscious of her body. Yet there was neither spirituality nor discipline in Eve's face. The blue-grey eyes held more than a hint of mutiny and the tilt of her head, never any less than proud, could very frequently be arrogant. Frank reflected that if she had buried her illusions she was not walking very comfortably as yet with the realities that had come to take their place, though the proud tilt of her head seemed to be defying them to do their worst. That defiant courage of hers Frank saw only as an infinitely pathetic thing; he could not bear to think what the years would do to it or her; to those brooding mutinous eyes, to the tender curve of her wide humorous mouth.

Her trick of making all arguments personal he saw as a progressive thing—a thing ruinously progressive—that even now betrayed the almost imperceptible twist of her fine cogent mind. All the same, he loved her passionate statement of things, found it difficult to believe that all that passion belonged, as Maud would have it did, to the mind. But about her silences, her occasional fierce withdrawals there was something strangely moving and hurtful. They had in them an implied despair that wrung his heart.

Maud went off to Dublin at the end of September. October came and silence crept down upon the woods that ran up steeply to Imberford. Beyond, the sweet open country, the faint mists rolling over Solbury Hill and Jeremy's ploughed fields long and shining beneath quiet skies.

But Clutton, lying still on the breast of Autumn, waking

slowly to a beauty that was new and passionless and brooding, left Eve untouched. Her heart was in Dublin with Maud Norman, and Clutton was no more than it had ever been—just the place of her captivity.

Then came Frank's proposal. . . .

He took what encouragement he could from the fact that afterwards she did not deny herself entirely to him, though she brought now to their friendship a leaven of primness and reserve that exasperated Frank without, however, securing him in his constant decision not to see her again. He always did see her again. There was even a day when he came near to asking her once more to marry him. They were walking in the woods that ran darkly uphill to Imberford, and Eve's mood was subdued and receptive, as though it borrowed something from the quiet of the spot in which they walked. There in the woods he had her close and intimately; more near to him she seemed than ever before. It was a mood you caught in Eve Bentley with exceeding rarity and had to make the most of. And then the rabbit came and spoiled it.

The rabbit, certainly, was in horrible case, caught in some hideous contraption of steel and wire and crying frantically. Eve, intent only upon the release and dispatch of the rabbit, failed to see that Frank, doing his best to help, had caught his finger in the trap and that it was bleeding profusely.

"What beasts men are!" she said, and the face she turned to him was white and angry, and those passionate wide eyes swept his face in detestation of the crimes of which she held his sex (and therefore, surely, in some way, himself) to be guilty. But Frank, conscious only of the fact that what she had done was brave and competent, failed to think, as at any other time he certainly would have done, "How absurd! As though no woman has ever been cruel to anything!" Instead he praised her for her efficiency and nerve as though he hoped to drive away that white angry look, to coax back that other he loved. But she did not seem to see the compliment he intended. Neither had she taken any notice of his finger, though the blood had soaked through the handkerchief he had twisted hurriedly about it.

"I hate the country," she said. "It's so horribly cruel!"

"So are the great towns," he said, adjusting the handkerchief to look a little less unsightly.

"I daresay, but they're not held up as the abode of goodness and charity. . . . Let me tie that up."

She took off the handkerchief and looked calmly enough at the mischief. "You'd better put some balsam on it when you get in. And keep your hand up." She bandaged the finger skilfully but casually as though she thought it rather clumsy of him to have hurt himself but was carefully refraining from saying so. And as she twisted and secured the bandage she talked—of something else.

"The people here are hateful to animals. There was a farmer last winter who cut a sick horse's throat and left it all night in a field to bleed to death. It didn't. It was a very cold night: the blood froze over the wound and prevented it. My father, taking a short cut to Eye next morning, found it there still alive and shot it." She paused, dropped his hand, and continued: "My father hates cruelty to animals. His own cruelty is much more refined than that—and confined to human beings."

The rabbit, the horse and Jeremy Bentley between them had certainly entirely spoiled that walk. Her bitterness tore at him, and though some little detached bit of him felt angry and chilled and exacting, all the other dissolved in compassion and concern and wanted nothing for itself. But it did want to save Eve. He thought: "Something's got to pull her up. Before long it will be too late."

It was not alone that thought, however, which impelled him, as he put it, to risk repeating his effects by asking her a second time to be his wife. That was a step he might never have taken had not the chance of an eagerly-coveted hospital appointment come his way towards the close of November. Maud wrote from Dublin that of course he must see that it would be madness to refuse, and though Frank did see that he saw also how extraordinarily empty London was going to be without Eve Bentley.

They went for what they thought was to be their last walk

together in mid-December. They walked by the road that climbed out of Clutton into Imberford, skirting the sombre leafless woods all the way. The afternoon drew to its close; the sun already dropped like a great red fruit into the blue-grey bowl of the west, and there at the top of the hill they paused for a moment to look back at the bright day hanging for a moment upon the edge of dusk. Something eager and passionate grew up in Frank as he looked away from the sunset to that quiet figure that stared back at the woods as though there was about them something hateful. Then, quite suddenly, he asked her again to marry him. And this time he was a little brutal about it. He knew that he was ready, this mist-haunted afternoon, to bully her, if necessary, into marrying him.

"Or do you prefer?" he asked her, as shaken, she hunted for words, "to remain one of the 'old maids of Clunbury Hall'?"

She took that quietly. There was but little sting left in the phrase, these days; there was no sting at all in his voice. But she answered him as he might have known she would, with a slight tilting of her chin, and that faint—that very faint—edge on her voice that was always like something deliberately taken out of it and put back differently.

"You think that if I don't marry you I'll never have another chance?"

He smiled. "To marry me?"

"To marry anyone."

Her chin rose again, as if she lifted herself thereby out of the sphere of his merriment or—much more hopeful thought!—out of the sphere of its influence.

"I refuse," he said, "even to think of your marrying anybody but me."

She looked at him. "You'd marry me because—like Clutton and Clunbury, you are a little sorry for me?"

He was suddenly serious. "No—because I love you." And suddenly tender. "Does that surprise you so very much, Eve?"

It seemed that it did, a little, as she stood there looking away from him across the dusky woods, her eyes, beneath

her frowning puzzled brows, like captives looking out upon a world with which they had nothing to do.

"Eve. . . . This is a very public place in which to demonstrate one's affection, but if you'll risk it, I will."

The eyes turned suddenly on his face had in them some element of appeal, for all that arrogant lift of her chin, as if they were begging him to see that they cancelled it out, and what she said.

"You take a good deal for granted, I think."

"Do I?" He looked at her, and was suddenly and most amazingly sure. "Eve. You can't make me believe you don't care at all for me. You're afraid—afraid to let yourself go, afraid of loving anybody."

"That's not true," she said, yet her voice fell very gently and the colour came into her face.

"Isn't it?" Frank's voice, too, was gentle. He came nearer but made no attempt to touch her. "Eve. I know it isn't marriage your heart's been set on, and I know I can't give you what you've missed. But you like me. You can't say you don't. Doesn't it strike you that marriage with me might be better, anyway, than this? Mayn't it, perhaps, lead somewhere?"

"And if it doesn't?"

"Mayn't the journey together, perhaps, be very pleasant? Eve, risk it, my dear."

She turned and looked at him. "It's your risk, too," she said.

He started a little as though he had not expected that of her. He was pleased that she had so surprised him, and, too, a little ashamed.

"Our risk, then," he said.

She stood there looking at him, not speaking, her eyes seeming to make less than nothing of that proud tilt of her chin.

"Eve!" he said quietly.

The defences were down. She let him take her firmly by the elbows. The face she lifted to him was pale, and beneath those puzzled frowning brows her eyes searched his face.

"I like you so much," she said, "I'd hate to make you unhappy."

"You can't—except by not marrying me."

"I'd like to believe that."

"Then do, darling."

She was stirred, delighted, so that she forgot the stand she was making against his enfolding arm.

"Eve, Eve, wake up! I love you, and though you don't know it yet, you love me—at least a little bit."

She said, her face very near to his: "Do I? I don't know. . . . I just don't know."

He looked long and searchingly into the face so near his own, then drew it nearer.

"That is good enough, I think, to go on with," he said.

There was on Eve's part a certain sweet half-faltering yielding in that first kiss, but there was, too, a certain reserve, as though, afraid, she clung still to some little bit of herself.

She was still clinging to it when in the New Year they were married, very quietly, in the dim old church at Clutton in which, more than thirty years ago, little Judith Dale had been married to Jeremy Bentley. This church ceremony represented Eve's one concession to her father's wishes, the final self-excusing act of her maidenhood. There was no reception; no guests had been invited to witness the triumphant departure of the younger of the Old Maids of Clunbury Hall—Eve's act of final acquiescence did not stretch quite so far as that.

She was very quiet on the journey to town, but Frank had the sense not to ask her what she was thinking about. Perhaps he knew that for the first time in her life she wasn't thinking at all; that her mind, empty of concern, lay within her, motionless, like a pool of silent water.

CHAPTER THREE

THERE began for Eve three years of happiness that despite its serenity was a thing astonishingly real and satisfying, a thing that not alone went deep but was cool-rooted, like Keats's flowers. Which was not to say that she had not been carried far beyond the white barrier of that initial reserve, but only that the source of her happiness, her content, remained essentially a cool delightful thing, like wind on a moor. She gave you love as a cool delightful gift. She had no tricks.

The tricks had all belonged to Linda. . . .

Strange, Frank used sometimes to think, that he should remember Linda's tricks in remembering that Eve had none. Two ways of loving, Linda's and Eve's. And he had known both. A little difficult to believe that, with Eve's hand warm and intimate upon his; difficult to remember what the world was like before he met Eve Bentley. Yet but for Linda he would never have gone to Clutton; never have met Eve at all. So it was that he caught up his memories of his cousin in a little web of gratitude.

Eve was grateful, too, for there were days when her meeting with Frank seemed to her the wildest, most wonderful piece of luck; when she was so happy her mind simply refused to take hold of it. She was not overburdened with domesticity, for Frank had coaxed Martha Goss—newly-retired upon [the pension John Norman had left her—from the bosom of her family in Liverpool to preside once again over the little house in Bayswater. Martha did not care for the things Eve had done with the drawing-room nor for her new wall-papers, but became reconciled to the changes when she discovered that

they represented the sole extent of Eve's interest in matters domestic, that Eve, "like the rest of the people who come to this house," was "queer."

"Queer" was Jeremy's word for Eve's new relatives. The old man who had died he considered must have been an amiable fool, judging by the terms of his will, who had wasted much time and money on impossible people and had got to himself a couple of children who were inclined to do the same. Maud, torn by Eve's wedding from her studies at Dublin, revealed herself to Jeremy as a young woman with short thick hair, "brushed anyhow," several letters after her name and a way of suggesting that she found Jeremy amusing. Maud had no hatred of men, even (in her own phrase) of men of the last citadel, like Jeremy. They amused her. Besides, she had got beyond their guard, had beaten them. She liked them for that more than a little.

Yet she found Jeremy a little pathetic. "After all," she told Eve, "none of his dreams came true. That's a perfectly beastly thing to happen to any of us. He believed that the steam-engine was going to make us self-supporting as a nation. And it didn't. It's a fact, isn't it, Frank, that since the advent of steam the acreage devoted to wheat-growing has diminished rather than increased? The clay soils of England didn't come up to scratch, I suppose. All the same, he must have sounded very modern and advanced in the eighteen-fifties."

"Oh, all those ideas about the land!" said Eve. "Surely he's forgotten them all by now?"

"I don't fancy he has," said Frank. "He'd be kinder to *our* 'modern' ideas if he had. He wouldn't see us as fools going out to meet disillusion. After all, his idea, you know, of a self-sufficient, self-feeding England was a pretty big one."

"It got in my way, certainly," said Eve.

"Oh, our own ideas always get in the way of the other chap's," Frank laughed.

"Not yours," said Eve. "You're perfectly wonderful the way you see other people's ideas." His toleration was really very wonderful to her. Before she knew Frank she had always

regarded toleration as the pleasant possession of people who had nothing else. No ideas, she meant, no opinions, either way—who didn't mind.

It was Maud, home from Paris, devoting all her energies to the crèche at Notting Hill, and living temporarily at Marne House with her brother and his wife, who suggested that Eve should take up dispensing. Maud had seen that in giving Martha Goss a free hand in the kitchen Eve had also given herself a good deal of liberty and was already looking round for something to do with it.

"You can take the Pharmaceutical Society's Certificate," Maud told her, "or that of the Apothecaries' Hall. The first'll take you about three years; the other, with luck, about a year. Your matric will help you."

A bright-eyed Eve, holding out eager hands towards that three-year course, was ridiculously crushed by Frank's quiet: "I should take the Apothecaries', darling. Three years is a long time, and I don't see how you could do it in less, whatever 'luck' you had. . . . You'd hate, my dear, to have to give it up half-way."

"Half-way?" For a moment she stared; then the colour came into her face. But Maud had got there first. "Oh heavens, yes. Married woman. Eventualities. Sorry, my dear, but I can never think of you as a married woman."

"What could I do with Apothecaries' Hall certificate?" Eve asked. The colour was still in her face; and an expression which Frank had not seen there for months, that said now, as it had said then, "Handicap! One never catches up!"

Frank said, a trifle absently, that she would only be able, of course, to get an assistant post. . . .

Eve accepted that and settled down to her studies, whilst Maud gathered together a private practice which she conducted for the simple and avowed object of making money to put into her precious Clinic for Women and Children. Jeremy was their only critic. "Fussing around other women and their babies instead of having babies of her own"—it was so he dismissed Maud's scheme and seemed to think it was somehow her fault that Eve had been married seven months and gave

no sign of the beginnings of a family. These new brainy women. No good for their job. . . .

It was Blanche Forrest who told him that when Eve became a mother she would stop wanting to be a chemist or whatever it was she did want to become. She waxed eloquent about the strength of the maternal instinct and alleged that she had always found it marvellous in "settling young women down." True, it had not settled Maud's mother down, but then Stephanie, to use the new word, was a Socialist. Socialists never settled down. They only unsettled everybody else. . . .

They had a lot in common, Jeremy and Blanche. They agreed that Frank had selected an extraordinary profession, that he took too many teeth out for nothing—"as though he really liked doing it"—and that it would be very dreadful if this terrible Mr. Parnell ever obtained Home Rule for Ireland or if women were ever given the vote. . . .

It was Jeremy who sent Eve the newspaper paragraph which announced the birth of a son and heir to Rosalind, Lady Wroxeter. Jeremy considered that the acquiring of a titled cousin by marriage was the cleverest thing Eve had ever done, though she discounted it considerably by not seeing to it that they were on visiting terms. After all, as Jeremy argued, if the old woman came. . . .

"Good for the fair Rosalind," said Frank when his attention was called to his cousin's achievement, but Eve thought it was wistfulness she detected behind his assumption of nonchalance.

"You're disappointed, Frank, aren't you?" she asked.

He smiled. "Because our cousin has produced a baby?"

"Because I haven't."

"My dear girl! What's the hurry? We haven't to carry on a dynasty, thank the lord. Lovat Stern. What a name! We'll call our son plain John when he arrives. . . ."

For the first time a sense of failure came to Eve. Was he, she wondered, only being decent about it? Nevertheless she went on with her studies, the surface of her happiness barely ruffled, its roots obstinately cool and peaceful. By the time she had secured her certificate Maud's Clinic had grown to include a dozen beds, an operating room and an out-patients' depart-

ment so heavily worked that Maud was glad enough to give her sister-in-law a post as assistant dispenser.

Then Frank's peeress cousin made sure of things by producing another boy. Somehow Eve found that rather upsetting. She wished she could be sure how much Frank minded her childlessness, just exactly how much he was hiding—if he was hiding anything at all. Of Linda's second achievement he said nothing except, good-humouredly, "Well, her ladyship's beating us!"

Eve liked him for that friendly "us," but a little colour came into her face, and for a moment her eyes were captives once again beneath the penthouse of her level brows. But when she spoke it was of something else.

In the weeks that followed there were days when looking at Frank's face that sense of failure was a little overwhelming.

It was certainly overwhelming when Frank began to go down with regularity to a Settlement for Boys in Whitechapel in which he had long been interested, but to which, so far, he had given only spasmodic attention.

These definite Tuesday and Friday evenings made a gap in Eve's life she did not care to recognise; not because the gap made her feel neglected or left her lonely (it didn't; there was never, since her marriage, a more self-sufficient person than Eve Norman), but because it opened up over some want in her husband's life that even his "decency" was not able to hide. Her own attempts to fill up the breach by going herself to the Settlement petered out rather unexpectedly, for she certainly was not successful with Frank's Whitechapel boys. "I don't like them and they don't like me," she told him, and went among them no more. Failure number two for that self-sufficient Eve who had aggravated her father at seventeen by her reiterated, "I won't fail, father. I won't fail. I promise you that."

Maud remained a little vague but cheerful about it all, for the problem of maternity as Maud Norman saw it daily, was less the problem of the woman who had no children than of the woman who had too many. The Clinic served to reveal Dame Nature as the Supreme Muddler.

"Those poor women who come to me," she said, "produce a baby a year with the most appalling regularity. They're worn out with it and yet they go on. If you remonstrate with them they say, 'The Lord has given and the Lord will provide.'" Maud laughed. "I wish He would."

"They mean the State," said Eve, "or philanthropy." She did not like the improvident poor of the Clinic, though she liked the opportunity of mixing their medicines.

"Well, whatever they mean it's a rotten system," said Maud. "Anything that undermines parental responsibility, human responsibility, is bad."

"Maud. Do you think women are going to have less children? The women of to-morrow, I mean?"

"One sort of women, at any rate—the sort that can't or won't be tied down to maternity, who wants other things as well. Less children and with less passion. And there'll be lots more of the women who won't have any children at all."

"Won't or can't?"

"Both."

"A third sex?"

"Call it what you like. A sex, anyway, that will want to do some of the work of the world rather than the work of the race."

Eve was unable to suppress a feeling that she did not belong to that "third sex," and that she had little sympathy with it. She hated to be told that there were things "brainy" women could not do, and saw that Maud was fighting for a recognition of the fact hidden in Jeremy's assertion that such women "couldn't do their own job properly." Now, as ever, the argument left her cold. The work of the world and the work of the race. She saw where the distinction lay, but dragged her mind away from it. "If we're any good, we 'new' women, we've got to do both," she said, "or men like father are justified. We've got to do the work of the world and the work of the race, even if the last part of it rather bores us." "Would it bore me, I wonder?" she thought, and remembered her failure at the Settlement in Whitechapel. . . .

It was in the early summer of ninety-five that Maud Norman

went off to share a house some half a mile away with a professional friend. Martha caught the first fever of her life, was sent off to the bosom of her family to convalesce, and Eve, left to her unsuccessful experiments with other people, began to see the difficulty of running a career and a household at the same time. But a little later Eve's dispensing came to an end, for she was aware that at last she was going to have a child. Instead of those busy mornings at the Clinic she stopped at home, and was sometimes sick and sometimes resentful and frequently both.

Even when that initial month of misery was past she was not by any means transported with delight. Now that the thing had actually happened she was, in fact, a little scared. For this was either the beginning or the end. Which? Anyway, life was never going to be quite the same again. She had an odd sense of resisting her own motherhood, of resenting the child that was coming to make things different, to narrow down her interests, to force them into one channel. And all the time there floated back to her that old determination of hers not to want her children as her mother had wanted them—not to let them "get hold" of her as Judith Bentley had done.

As a prospective mother she was not, on the whole, a success. She had no ecstasy, no days of sweet anticipation—none of the things Beth had prophesied for her. For the first time in her life she was conscious of her body and a little disgusted by it. She was often tired, acquired headaches and yet hated to be fussed and waited on. She missed her busy days at the hospital and Maud coming in to meals with her fund of good spirits and tales. She did not care for housekeeping, but managed her house with that expertness that characterised all the things she did, and if there were crises nobody knew of them but Eve, who didn't talk about them. She took pride in herself as the "sort of woman who could keep a servant," and early recognised Frank as the kind of man who could always be induced to believe that dinner was about to be served if he found the table laid.

But if she failed as a prospective mother Frank was not aware of it, being absorbed in himself as a prospective father,

in which rôle he was certainly a colossal success. Yet even while Eve envied him the lack of demand his imminent fatherhood made upon him, she despised it a little because it was so easy.

Four months, six, seven. . . . Two months yet before she would know the answer to life's conundrum. The beginning or the end?

"I wish it didn't take so long," she said to Frank. "Nine months is an eternity."

Frank's ecstatic face broadened into a grin.

"You weren't made in nine months," he said, "or in ninety. Don't you imagine it. Centuries went to the making of you."

Eve smiled. That, rather, was how she felt. Old. Old as time. As old as that first Eve. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

JOHN MARK was born in the March of eighteen-ninety-four, and was therefore nearly two years old when his sister, Monica Eve, arrived in the February of ninety-six. Eve brought off both these events easily and to time. There were no complications. A boy and a girl. She had, so Frank declared, done excellently.

But Eve was a good deal less sure of it. Her satisfaction in event number one was seriously handled by the precipitant happening of event number two, the first indications of which came just when Eve, to Aunt Blanche's rather comic dismay, had picked up again the threads of what she called her ordinary existence. She might have picked them up much earlier; when Mark (they called him that) was three months old. But Eve could not bring herself to believe that her immediate business with that young man was finished when she had brought him into the world.

"You needn't go on feeding him, you know," Maud said when Master Mark was a month old. "Women aren't cows. No use feeding him up with your resentment and boredom."

"I'm not resentful or bored," said Eve. She hoped she could make sacrifices for her son and make them cheerfully. All the same, she was rather pleased with herself until Maud said in her brutal fashion, "Oh, if you don't mind shelving other things for a few months you'll doubtless find it pleasant enough. Most women regard it as some sort of compensation for all the business that went before."

Eve never said whether she found it pleasant or not, but she certainly seemed pleased when the nine months were up and

immediately began to make arrangements for going on with her work. She engaged an excellent nurse and, since the clinic had been too hard-pressed to wait for her, secured another dispensing appointment, this time with a chemist who did not think women ought to be "doing this sort of thing," but rather wanted to see what "sort of fist" they made of it. During those early days of ninety-five Eve moved on air, her elation three-parts satisfaction because she hadn't cut anything out, because she had not only secured the qualification for her new appointment, but had also produced John Mark, whom she adored. Also, she adored her husband for understanding that there was rather more of her than either John Mark or he could wholly satisfy—or that at least there usually was. She even began to dream again of a medical career. . . .

She had reckoned without the impetuosity of Monica Eve.

"Checkmate!" said Frank, thinking of that Medical Course in the Autumn to which she would not now go.

Eve faced the situation, gave up her post with the chemist (which annoyed him very much and confirmed all his prejudices about women in men's jobs) and came home to await Miss Monica's arrival.

She was very bored. For the second time she wished it didn't take so long to have a baby: for the second time her thoughts turned inwardly, yet away from herself and her dreams. For the second time she put away one set of books and read another, chiefly novels, that included the latest Mr. Hardy and the first Mr. Conrad, and Stevenson's *Ebb Tide*, whose marked lack of female interest she seemed, at that first reading in ninety-five, to find consoling. For her criticism of novels was invariable. "Too much love," she said of them all (even now whilst she waited for the ripening of the fruit of her own love). "One would think there was nothing else in the world at all. Haven't they heard, any of them, of that other little word—*work*?"

Mr. Shaw on love at Mr. Grein's Independent Theatre was a good deal more exhilarating. Frank took her there—very

unfashionable in her full maternity gown—to see *Arms and the Man* and *Candida*, and elsewhere to see *The Importance of being Earnest*, which delighted her, and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, at which she felt she had a right to laugh. One hour only in a woman's life, and that a sexual. . . . It was not true.

Monica Eve, when she arrived, seemed not so pleased, after all, with the big world into which she had hurried, so that there was some initial difficulty in persuading her to remain. There was no question this time as to whether Eve should feed her or not. Monica Eve's mother had left the dispensary for good. She would attend no Medical Courses. . . .

Eve, who believed that the differences of sex have been artificially encouraged and deepened in the nursery, ignored them entirely in her own. The phrase "only a girl" was never heard in it. Mona and Mark were just two tiny human creatures for whom toys were bought in general fashion, neither being allowed to claim any one thing as his or her own—an arrangement to which Mark strenuously objected until he discovered that, like so much else, it was a mere trick of words. The engines and soldiers were really his for the simple but adequate reason that Mona never bothered about them, but played with the dolls (at which Mark, of course, never looked) for hours at a time, invading his masculine domain only with a mild request to be allowed to ride on the "boofy horse," which, gaily painted in red and blue, lurked, gigantic but inviting, behind the nursery door.

So did another of Eve's theories suffer eclipse—this theory of hers that Mark would cry for the dolls and Mona scream for engines. But she did not for that reason abandon it, recognising in Mona an "unusually delicate and sensitive child, by no means a fitting subject for experiment" and certainly not "representative." And Frank smiled because she was so obviously regretful that she had no second daughter upon whom to try the test.

However, when the Boer War broke out in the autumn of ninety-nine, Eve found herself confronted with a problem infinitely more perplexing than her small daughter's reactions

to experiment, for Frank, like so many other people (only so much more unexpectedly) was badly smitten with the South African fever, and Eve did not look with favour upon the British cause in South Africa.

"Frank doesn't believe a scrap in all this nonsense about Majuba Hill and revenge," she said to Maud. "He thinks, as we do, that Gladstone was right when he said we'd acted insanely in seventy-nine towards the Boers. So if he thinks England's in the wrong, why does he want to go and fight?"

And Maud knew.

Not patriotism, not the wanderlust, not the Spirit of Adventure was drawing Frank to the Recruiting Office, but that long line of defeat.

"I see," said Eve, "it's the losing game which intrigues him. That hadn't occurred to me," and she looked as though now that it had been suggested to her she saw it only as a third-class reason for doing a quite third-class thing.

But Maud was not concerned, it seemed, with the ethics of the war, but with Eve's attitude to Frank's expressed desire to "join up." "Useless, my dear, to try to keep a man from doing something he's set his heart upon. Far better risk it and let him go."

An Eve aghast rather than angry answered the charge.

"I'm *not* 'keeping him,'" she said, and made it clear that though she knew there were ways of "keeping" a man she would rather have died than employ them. How dare Maud suggest that she had?

Maud didn't, she said.

"Don't be idiotic, Eve. I don't accuse you of employing the usual feminine tricks—God forbid!—but you do make it a bit difficult, you know. Just by standing there with that little scornful air. You do, rather, you know, use it as a barrier. Or as a shield."

"You mean I oughtn't to be there at all, that I ought to get out of the way—efface myself?"

Put like that Maud seemed not to like it very much. She said: "I don't pretend it would be easy."

"Easy?" Eve gasped. "But, Maud, I'd just *hate* Frank to go out and kill Boers. So would you."

"I know. But we can't expect other people to refrain from doing things because of our scruples."

But it wasn't like that Eve saw it.

"If we're right, then Frank is wrong," she said.

"And if Frank doesn't believe that? I mean, if he doesn't see it in clear black and white like that? What then?"

"I still can't do it," Eve said. "I can't stand by indifferently and watch somebody I care for doing what I think definitely wrong."

But when she was alone she saw that it was not entirely her feeling about the war which kept her standing here in the way but her feeling about Frank. She was eternally beset by the fear that he would one day go out and do something drastic and irretrievable, but she hid her fear as she so frequently hid her affection, beneath an outward calm so unwavering that Frank failed altogether to realise it: was moved to nothing but a vague, futile irritation at the rigid consistency of her attitude to the war.

"You extraordinary creature," he said. "Don't you feel *anything*?"

"I don't feel excited," she said. How *could* one over "We don't want to fight" and "The Absent-minded Beggar?" If *they* excited you your head was weak indeed. But Frank *was* excited, and that Eve wasn't he found extraordinarily exasperating. "If we were doing well," she said, "wild horses wouldn't drag you into it."

"Oh, confound your level-headedness," he said. "We *aren't* doing well."

We certainly were not. Since the thing began, nothing but that long string of defeats. The early repulse at Nicholson's Nek, the Modder River disaster and Buller's defeat at Colenso. Eve found herself praying for victories, though she did not believe Britain was entitled to them, and the appointment of Roberts and Kitchener to important posts in early December she was inclined to take as a direct answer to her pleadings.

Surely Roberts and Kitchener between them must do something!

Christmas came and the New Year, and they didn't seem, so far, to have done very much. The Boers were attacking Ladysmith and at Spion Kop Buller had suffered another repulse with severe losses. Linda's husband was on the point of taking out a body of yeomanry, and Eve despaired because she knew how much Frank wanted to join it and because Aunt Blanche wrote sweetly to Eve that if things could be arranged she was quite sure her dear girl would be sensible and brave and that, really, it *was* everybody's duty; only unfortunately her own poor boy . . . and because Linda wrote, even more sweetly, to Frank that "of course Lovat was most keen on having him. . . ."

And still Eve went on with her policy of saying nothing—in words; still she stood there with her "confounded level-headedness," her little scornful air of seeing all war as folly and this war in particular as something far worse. She could *not* efface herself. Something in her cried out in protest that Frank didn't see the thing as she saw it. They agreed on so much. Why not here? They had never differed deeply about a thing before: she saw his point of view as invariably lofty, enlightened—else how should she so frequently agree with it? She believed in herself and her point of view, and she believed in Frank and his . . . because, until now, it had almost invariably been hers. And now it was Frank who had lowered the flag, stepped down from the pedestal. For all she looked upon him with that little air of pathetic disappointment that was so dreadfully like scorn, something within her quivered with pain. She just "couldn't see" how anybody could feel like that about "this war."

When Frank called her hard she set her teeth and endured it. You were hard, of course, if you didn't capitulate, if you didn't shout with the mob. . . . "Hard?" She wasn't hard enough. She never had been, but she had been so happy these last few years she had almost forgotten how much she had longed, had needed, to be. There had always been people who could drag her locked-up emotions out

of her; her mother, Frank, her children, but especially Frank.

So, in these difficult days that trailed on towards the end of ninety-nine, she shied away again as years ago she had done at Clutton, from the fact of her own vulnerability. She clung now, as she had clung then, to her shield of scorn and level-headedness, and with a hint of that old defiant courage that though he missed it now Frank had once thought so infinitely pathetic.

Eve didn't see how anything was going to prevent him from going out in February with the Wroxeter Horse. . . .

Then, suddenly, at the end of January Nature declared herself on her side, as if she would make amends for that occasion once before when she had come riding heavily through all Eve's plans and schemes. Eve was suddenly aware that she was going to have another child.

"When?" said Frank when she told him.

"September . . . October. . . ." Eve, not too certain of her dates, stumbled over them.

Frank looked at her.

"You don't seem very sure. . . ." He laughed. "You're not . . . having me on?"

She fell away from him as though he had struck her.

"You think that of me?" she said, hurt to the soul.

But Frank seemed not to notice.

"By God, Eve, this is clever of you!" he said, and strode from the room.

For a long time she sat quite still where he had left her. She was very angry; too angry to make excuses, to see even ever so faintly why he had taken her news in the way he did. That he had said what he had was intolerable. And crossing her anger, like a tongue of flame, there leaped presently the thought that he resented this child because its coming had upset his plans. Mark and Monica, of course, had merely upset hers. . . . She hated him for having made her remember those plans and ambitions; for disturbing the soil and showing her that little patch of resentment she had scarcely known was there.

That, when he came in later and apologised, kept her rigid in his arms, cold stone beneath his kisses.

"Eve, stop it," he said, "stop hating me," and was shocked at the violence with which she turned suddenly in his arms and burst into uncontrollable sobbing. He had never known Eve cry before, and her crying seemed to him now the most terrible thing in the world.

A few weeks later the Wroxeter Yeomanry sailed without him, and presently Aunt Blanche wrote from Wroxeter Towers an epic of courage and patriotism. Linda's, of course. . . . For Linda, too, was expecting a child and had kept the news to herself until her husband was on the way out. "Of course Lovat would never have gone," wrote Aunt Blanche, "if he had known. It was so dear and sweet of the child . . . so wonderfully unselfish!"

This, to Eve, postulated a degree of superiority in the Fair Unknown (Eve's name for Linda) that she found wellnigh insupportable. She was extraordinarily irritated by this sweet and charming picture Aunt Blanche had drawn of the Lady Wroxeter and which, to Eve's sharpened sensibilities, some faint vague air about Frank seemed, ever so gently, to be outlining.

It was very hot that summer in London, and it was a Frank very indifferent to South African affairs who bundled Eve off into the country at the beginning of June, an Eve more languid and more inclined to worry about herself than she had ever been in similar circumstances before. And when Frank remembered that night at the beginning of February he was inclined to worry, too. An idiotic time to choose for their first quarrel.

A few weeks later there came the simultaneous news of the death of Lord Wroxeter in South Africa and the birth of a daughter to his wife in Ireland.

Frank took that piece of news with him when he went down to see Eve on the Saturday, and to the letter of condolence he wrote Linda he suggested that Eve might care to add a postscript.

Eve looked down at the page she held in her hand

and inquired, "But aren't all these 'we's' sufficiently inclusive?"

That certainly, Frank admitted, was the intention.

"It has succeeded very nicely," Eve smiled. "Really, my dear, I couldn't improve on it, and there doesn't seem anything I could possibly *add*. You do this sort of thing so well."

But as she handed him back his letter and watched him slip it into an envelope she thought: "Too well," and was annoyed because those tender sympathetic phrases to another hurt her a little. Frank was always so enigmatic about his cousin and so silent: except when Maud's cynical frankness about the young woman urged him to her defence. Frank did not say harsh things about people: if there was nothing good to say he held his tongue. Eve was aware that she thought it a little weak of him.

"Frank," she asked him now, "do you think your cousin was fond of her husband?"

He said: "Well, it's only charitable, isn't it, to assume that she was?"

Charitable. Yes, he was always that.

"Maud says that she married Lord Wroxeter for his title and position."

"Maud was never very fair to Linda."

"I thought Maud was fair to everybody."

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"Who is?" he asked. "Are you too tired to walk to the post with me?"

"No, but there's nothing until six o'clock and I've my shoes to change."

He fetched them; made her sit down while he put them on for her. Linda slipped out of the conversation, but not out of Eve's thoughts. She thought she hated her a little, because if she really *had* cared for her husband she had certainly done a brave thing: a thing so brave, so difficult, Eve felt she could never have done it in a thousand years.

But when Frank had gone back to town she reflected that this was not the time for hating anybody, for any reason at all. She felt deplorable and the heat was appalling. Always

rather bored by the solitary company of her children she sighed a little now at the thought of the turbulent Mark who was coming down to her at the end of the week when holidays at his kindergarten released him. She hoped he would keep his hat on and not get sunstroke. Maud travelled down with him, stayed a week and laughed Aunt Blanche's epic of courage to scorn. Maud was rather brutal and rarely communicative.

"I suppose," Eve said, "you saw a lot of her once?"

"Oh, no. We weren't the sort of people Linda would ever allow to see a 'lot of her.' There was one short period when Aunt Blanche had a house up the river at Taplow and used to ask us down there for week-ends and holidays. You see, Linda wasn't any good on the river and we are, rather. Then young Wroxeter came along. . . ."

"Why is it," Eve asked suddenly, "that Frank will never talk about his cousin?"

Was it her fancy, or did Maud look a little uncomfortable?

"Oh," she said airily, "because he's a sentimentalist, and believes the best of people—even when there isn't any best. How can you expect any man to believe that there's nothing that matters behind a face as beautiful as Linda's? If you introduce a man to a pretty girl you can see him inventing a soul for her on the spot. The same sort of soul—the sort of soul that should go with that sort of face and so seldom does."

They excused this masculine weakness with a smile Frank would have found it very beautiful to see. But he would not have disputed their contention.

With Maud went Eve's vague feeling of jealousy against this woman she had never seen, and because the acknowledgment of her jealousy had been so painful she put it, with so much else, to the account of her physical condition. The baby and the heat . . . and her own boredom with this country existence. She wanted to get back to London, where people were travelling on the new "Tube" railway and playing a table game called "ping-pong" and going to the play.

She was very ill when her child was born at the end of September. It was a girl, and Eve called her Judith, after the

woman who had wanted all her children as Eve had wanted this one.

It was months before she was well enough to go home, and long before then she had decided that she would have no more children.

■

BOOK III

EVE AND FRANK

CHAPTER ONE

EVE NORMAN'S children grew up with the idea that their mother was a very busy person, who "took an interest in things and didn't believe in growing slack."

It was their father's phrase, and the sprightly air with which he enunciated it at intervals very successfully hid the fact that there were times when he wanted with some urgency to grow very slack indeed. He wanted to stop looking at people's teeth; to stop reading the newspapers; to stop following the political situation; to stop wondering when they were going to give women the vote, and to stop going down to the Settlement in Whitechapel. Goals and objects ceased to matter. He wanted only Eve and a tiny house in the country, with their children in a state of perpetual youth and money falling like manna from the skies. But he never said so. He accepted his business in life, which had nothing whatever to do with cottages in the country, but was sternly concerned with the necessity to maintain a steady income that was as steadily swallowed up by rates, school fees, servants' wages, bills for food and clothes, subscriptions to various societies, tickets for numerous lectures; special contributions for special reasons to special causes.

It was a mood entirely foreign to Eve, about whom there was a flood of vitality depleted scarcely at all by this business

of being a good wife and mother. She accepted her wifely allowance with the calm of the woman who knows she has well and truly earned it, and went looking for something quite other than economic independence in the numerous activities with which she associated herself. She could not now be a doctor, but she went back on busy days to the dispensary at Stephanie House ; she sat on Committees, moved with grave decision down the Suffrage path and worked indefatigably in the interests of movements which were going to "improve" things. It was not only Eve who said that : but it was certainly Eve who raised her eyebrows when Frank said, "I wonder if we mean *complicate* them?" Of her happiness there was no shadow of doubt. Level-headedness grew upon her with the days that no longer ran back to her empty, but dropped quiet as snow into the pool of yesterday. She had organised her life and her household with an efficiency wholly amazing, and though she neglected neither husband nor children, though, without flurry or hurry she had time miraculously for everything and for everybody, there were days when Frank felt himself just a motif in her pattern of life, a mere thread in its fabric. And it seemed to him then that there in those dark woods at Imberford, before he had done more than touch her hand in greeting or farewell, he had had her more closely and intimately than ever he had her now.

But Eve's children, undisturbed by memories of woods, took her activities not only for granted, but with something approaching relief. With the young Normans "Careers for Mothers" was already an established and comforting fact, which meant that there was a good deal of discipline mixed up with the freedom Eve allowed them. They admired their mother tremendously, but she was on their minds a little because she expected so much, and would, as they put it, have expected so much more, but for all the other things that called for some part of her attention. Only very seldom, these days, had she any sense of failure where her children were concerned, chiefly, of course, because Mona and Mark were older and she could appeal to their intelligence ; but also because Judy had done so much to justify the nursery

theories which Mona had so rudely shattered. No more than Mona did Judy scream for her brother's mechanical toys, but that was only because it was never Judy's way to scream for anything, save the attentions of a pin in a wrong place. But it was certainly the mechanical toys and not the dolls that Judy played with. Eve learned as the years passed to be grateful for these two girls of hers, for there were still times when she felt that a trio of boys would have been as depressing as that Settlement in Whitechapel. She found Mark rather a baffling proposition, but was electrified by Jeremy's declaration that Mark was herself all over again. "Superior little devil you were!" he told her. "Always knew better than anybody else." "She does now," said Frank, teasing her, and, "Mark, take your elbows off the table," Eve said sharply to that young gentleman who had appreciated his father's joke too thoroughly.

It was Jeremy, too, hearing his daughter lament some arithmetical failure of Mona's, who called her a foolish woman.

"What use is arithmetic going to be to that child?" he wanted to know. "She'll be married before you can turn round."

"I will not have ideas of that sort put into the child's head!" Eve said and Jeremy laughed.

"Well, there'll be plenty of people to put 'em there before long, anyhow. You're not going to make any short-haired woman doctor of Mona Norman, my girl, so don't you imagine it."

At ten Mona was already exhibiting the fatal combination of brains and beauty, though the adjective was not Eve's. She, indeed, was very far from seeing the combination in that dismal fashion, not believing with George du Maurier that flat feet and a generally unprepossessing appearance were the natural concomitants in clever women, and she laughed when Frank accused her of seeing Mona as the prospective repudiation of "the three clever Miss Bilderbogies." But it pleased her that Mona was chosen for school matches and concerts, and that in addition she was expected to do well in her exams. It was of course characteristic of Eve that she continually put

more emphasis upon her scholastic work than upon her lessons in art. Having no leaning towards the artistic professions herself, it never occurred to her that she might have produced a child who had. Her drawing and painting, as Eve saw them, would make excellent hobbies, but must not be allowed to distract her from the more serious business of life.

As for Jeremy's contention, "He's got marriage on the brain," she complained to her husband. "You know, Frank, I'd *bate* the girls to footle through life just waiting for a husband. I do want them to make something of their lives."

"I want them to be happy," said Frank in his simple fashion.

"And useful."

"Didn't we agree once that the terms were synonymous?"

"I suppose they are still."

"Eve! *You've* been happy?"

"Been? I *am* happy," she said, "but you don't think about happiness in that definite sort of way. Your happiness is rather like your dinner—you don't think or say much about it unless there's something the matter with it."

"Darling, do you know, you always sound such a very lukewarm advocate of marriage," Frank complained and watched that little furrow come into Eve's brow.

"I *won't* have my girls taught that marriage is the only thing in the world," she said. "*They* won't have to buy freedom with marriage."

"Nevertheless, if your father had had our ideas of freedom for his daughters, you'd never have married me. Confess now."

How was she to know that he would have given all he possessed to hear her say, "Nothing in the world would have prevented me from marrying you?" Eve's unbendings you might count on the fingers of one hand. There was still much that you must take for granted. She was no Romantic and, for all her happiness and content, the prose of life still came shouldering the poetry.

"My dear, how can I tell?" she smiled. "What questions you ask!"

"Which you never answer."

"But I *can't* answer them, dear. Who could? I suppose that if my father'd been like yours I should have led a very different sort of life. A life, I mean, without you and the children."

She had woven her love and her marriage so tightly into the fabric of life, that she could not tell what the pattern would be without them. But it hurt Frank that, even ever so faintly, she should try to imagine it, though he smiled at the mental vision he had of Eve at her old game of "keeping love in its place." He was over forty and so was Eve, and yet more than anything else in the world he wanted her to put her arms round his neck and kiss him. He knew she would not, so he put his round hers and kissed her instead. And Eve laughed.

"Really, Frank, you are very ridiculous," she said.

How many times had Eve said that when he had kissed her in that unexpected fashion? Perhaps it was her way of saying she liked it. Well, you would never get her to say it any more plainly. Not if you tried for a thousand years.

"The tide of progress seems to have receded a little this evening," he said presently. "Has it knocked you about so much that you're too tired to do a theatre? We'll splash it and go in the stalls."

They didn't do that often, these days. Mark and Mona and Judy between them had long ago converted the stalls into the Upper Circle.

So the years moved on. In them old Jeremy Bentley exchanged the downs, rolling up and away from Solbury, for the thin faint line of the Surrey hills, and, doing nothing to stave off Time, yet kept it miraculously at bay. In them Blanche Forrest, doing everything to keep Time at bay, stared year by year, a little closer into its merciless eyes. In them, too, Maud Norman's enterprises flourished, the beautiful Linda became little more than a legend, a name in the Society columns of the newspapers, a photograph in the sixpenny weeklies. And Beth lived on in the happiness she had snatched and retained, and Mary grew thin on good works and the Surrey air.

A procession of happy years. For Eve they were like sunlight creeping up the House of life. She was right there, at least. You do not think about happiness that is as quiet and as deep as all that. You just absorb and are absorbed by it. Only when they were over did Eve begin to understand how strangely and beautifully adequate those years had been.

And at the end of them the gaunt figure of Theodore Mostyn. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

FROM the first Eve never liked Theodore Mostyn. He alone of all the "queer" people who came and warmed themselves at her fireside (and she did not admit that the women who came to her political meetings were "queer" at all) enjoyed the distinction of Eve's not too carefully disguised hostility. It was Frank who, encountering him at the Settlement, had brought him home in his casual fashion, volunteering no further information about him than that he had been mixed up with some unsavoury artistic set in London and had gone, for a time, fairly thoroughly to the devil. He had slowed up now, Frank said, and seemed to think it was his duty to assist him in this laudable endeavour. Eve, however, was less clear that it was hers, and was not helped to clarity of vision by Frank's remark that Mostyn did excellently with the boys at the Settlement and was devoted to children.

"Our own kiddies like him," he said. "Mona's particularly taken with him."

"That's the danger," said Eve. "We can't afford to admit men of doubtful character to our home now that the children are growing up."

Eve exercising an intelligent concern for the welfare of the race! Frank smiled.

"My dear, there *isn't* any danger. Let me bring the poor chap to dinner some day next week."

Mostyn came, and from neither Eve's point of view nor from Frank's could the dinner be called a success. But only Frank was aware that the swords she crossed with him throughout its progress were each time a little keener, a little more sharply thrust than they would have been if Theodore Mostyn's collar

had been a trifle cleaner. "Anti-progress," she said to herself between the soup and the cheese, and over the coffee, "anti-woman, anti-everything-we-care-about. I *wonder* what Frank sees in him? . . . He can't *respect* him. I don't count the children. Children are like that. *My* children would make friends with the devil if he came amongst us! But Frank!" Surely, even to *his* toleration, there was a limit! Nevertheless, she envied him his dry, impersonal way of taking up Mostyn's contentions, wondered how he managed to maintain that abstracted method of argument, as though, after all, he did not much care, either way. For he did care. He would not be Frank, the man she—the fastidious Eve Bentley—had married, if he did not.

"He catalogues the virtues . . . labels them Male and Female," she complained to Frank, "and the list labelled Female is shorter and a good deal the less interesting. Sweetness, tenderness, charity, placidity; against courage, strength, honour, loyalty, cleverness, wit, humour, initiative, enterprise, daring. . . . I could go on for ever. Pie, Frank, the gospel of Pie. Whose expression is that?"

Frank did not know: but he did know that the virtues could not be divided as easily as all that. "Mostyn didn't mean the division to apply to you, Eve. He called you an exceptional woman, if you remember." Frank laughed. "*Are you?*"

But Eve's sense of humour, never very reliable, quite deserted her.

"I haven't any use," she said, "for a man who pays you compliments at the expense of your sex, and expects you to be flattered."

"I'm afraid, you know, the 'exceptional' wasn't meant as a compliment."

"You mean, he wasn't complimenting me upon being 'exceptional,' but all the other women upon being . . . the other thing." She laughed. "Well, I hope he won't pass his opinion on to the Settlement boys. Their opinion of women seemed to me sufficiently low as it is. By the way, what does he find to do there?"

There was a curious eagerness, she thought, in Frank's

enumeration of Mostyn's capacities to entertain the youthful. ("The boys *I* couldn't do anything with!" thought Eve.)

"Oh, he comes down and talks books. He does it extraordinarily well, too. And he gives drawing lessons. You must get him to show you some of his things. He has a facility with the Arts and a real feeling for literature . . ."

"A little of everything," said Eve, "except backbone. You do love the halt and the blind, my dear."

Nevertheless, Theodore Mostyn continued, like so many others, to come and go, and whilst the children obviously adored him, Eve grew used to the sight of him there at her dinner table or beside her hearth and grew used to the things he said without ever approving of them. But she never grew used to his fondness for her children, nor to theirs for him, and was sensible of quite irrational annoyance when he confirmed Frank's contention that Mona's drawing was worth watching and taught her to model small heads and figures in clay. The artistic professions might be all very well, though Theodore Mostyn and his friends constituted no argument in their favour, but they were scarcely what Eve had in mind for this clever and beautiful little daughter of hers.

"Art," said Theodore Mostyn, "has no place in Mrs. Norman's scheme of things. It's the most dreadful Utopia of any I've encountered, with everybody organised to a point of ant-like efficiency, most terribly engaged in the completely utilitarian. Your world appals me, Mrs. Norman."

Frank, too, professed to find it rather appalling, but Frank was a dentist and, therefore, any such attitude on his part could, of course, be nothing but a pose. Eve did not say so, but her smile seemed to say it with a degree of emphasis no mere arrangement of words could have attained. Nevertheless, since Mona's passion for books and paint and clay had to be explained, and obviously had nothing to do with Eve, it became natural to say to Frank: "Well, she gets it from you, I suppose . . ." and Frank laughed, because it was for all the world as if she accused him of handing on to the child some physical or mental deficiency.

It was months later when someone filled in the gap in Eve's

information concerning Theodore Mostyn and exclaimed at the footing upon which she could not but observe he frequented Marne House. "But I thought you were so strict about that sort of thing. . . . I do think we enlightened women cannot be too particular. . . . No, of course, I felt quite *sure* you were not in possession of the facts."

And Eve—the Eve who took an "intelligent interest in the welfare of the race"—passed this information on to Frank, who, to her amazement, proceeded not to deny the facts but to augment and restate them.

"My dear Eve," he said, "you can't get at it in that cut-and-dried fashion. My own opinion is that it wasn't ever much use expecting Mostyn to lead the ordinary humdrum life of the suburban husband. Reverse positions and see how it would have bored you. You have to make some allowance for temperament and it was Mostyn's misfortune to marry a woman who couldn't. He was twenty-five then and working in the City, getting his stuff written at odd moments. . . . It doesn't appear to have interested Mrs. Mostyn, and she couldn't stand his Bohemian friends. . . . was rude to them when they came to the house. She never saw his point of view about anything: simply didn't understand why the life she was used to wasn't good enough for him. She had a small income of her own and, I gather, was credited with having married beneath her. They had been married five years—their boy was four—when she discovered this affair with the other woman. She left him, taking the boy with her. That was the beginning of Mostyn's brief sojourning with the devil. The other woman, I gather, didn't count. The affair was practically over when the wife found out and the whole thing might have been averted if she hadn't been so precipitate."

"If she'd put up with the intrigue, I suppose you mean?" Eve suggested, and Frank flushed at her tone.

"Well, anyway, my dear, she *didn't* put up with it. She couldn't get a divorce but she left him. He never saw the boy again until his mother died a year ago. That was cruel, Eve."

"Yes. But he was cruel too, when he indulged in the affair

with the other woman. You men want to eat your cake and have it." She smiled. "It's a little hard on the cook."

"But to be so implacable? Doesn't that make marriage a purely physical affair? And we know it isn't anything of the sort, don't we? . . . that there's so much else in it, too. There must have been something else in it for them once, for Mostyn says they'd been happy enough till then . . ."

Eve shrugged her shoulders.

"Till he was found out?"

"Eve! He *adored* her."

"So I should have gathered."

It was early June, and Eve was arranging a coloured ribbon round a hat—of the new Panama variety—for Monica. The air with which she snapped off her cotton and stabbed her needle into the arm of her chair seemed to indicate that there was really nothing further to be said of Theodore Mostyn.

There was a little uncomfortable silence in which Frank refilled his pipe, and Eve, taking up her needle, sat there stabbing the upholstered arm of her chair with it.

"Frank, it's no good . . . I can't see the thing a bit like that . . . I've lived too near it. My mother 'put up with things'; she pretended not to see. . . . She *expected* men to be like that. I mean she didn't expect anything else of them. I do. Frank, we have *got* to alter that attitude. . . . I know Dr. Johnson said that a wise woman shuts her eyes to her husband's infidelities, but Dr. Johnson ought to have been shown some of the consequences . . ."

Frank said: "Mostyn wasn't a bad lot. . . . Quite decent men take a false step, and who was it said that it isn't the worst men who do the worst things?" Eve said nothing, but returned to Monica's new hat. Frank lighted his pipe and began again—somewhere else.

"Eve . . . the boy's a charming kid, though God only knows why they called him Shane. He's a little older than Mark and at boarding-school. I was going to ask you to have him here during the holidays, or if we take that cottage at Broadstairs in August, he might come with us then. Mostyn's

living at present in furnished rooms at Forest Gate . . . not much of a place, I fancy, for a growing boy. And he's shy with his father. I suppose his mind has been . . ."

"Poisoned?" Eve suggested, not without malice.

"Confused, I was going to say. . . . Eve, aren't you being a little hard?"

"On Theodore Mostyn? Perhaps. But aren't you a little hard on the wife?"

"No. I'm sorry for both of them, but she's beyond either my pity or your championship. What I can't help seeing is that it was not only Mostyn's happiness but her own that she smashed up."

"I should have thought he had already done the smashing. P'raps she didn't want the spoiled and broken thing he'd made of her happiness. Besides, in similar circumstances, would he have forgiven her? Men don't. Look at my father and Beth. Eighteen years ago and he has refused to see her or to write to her." She tossed Monica's gaily-clad hat upon the table with a little *moue* of disgust. "What did you say that boy's name was? Shane? Of course I'll have him here. Can't he come here for a week before we go down to Broadstairs? If he fits in he might join the family party."

"Eve, that's darling of you." He ignored the air which, ever so faintly, emanated from Eve as of one who, in conscious rectitude, deliberately refrained from visiting the sins of the father upon the child.

Frank sighed. Well, there it was . . .

Shane came and was approved as the "really charming kid" Frank had proclaimed him. A year later, when his father died from a cold "from which anybody else would have recovered" (as Eve said), Eve was so sorry for the small boy in black who came to the funeral that she had nothing whatever to say against Frank's proposal that he should come to make his home with them at Marne House and go to St. Paul's with Mark.

Shane, a year older than Mark, settled down with an eagerness which was a little pathetic into the home circle at Marne House, and early displayed an enthusiasm for Eve which

embarrassed quite as much as it delighted her. She agreed that Shane was a most unselfish youngster. It was always Shane who did things for you : Shane who went to the post for you, who carried your parcels, ran your messages ; Shane who remembered your birthday and saved his pocket-money to buy you some small gift, whilst Mark would say airily that he had had no end of expenses that term but that if the pater would give him a sub . . . But even when he secured the sub it was not always certain that Eve received her present. She thought : Mark is growing very hard and selfish . . . very *masculine* . . . and she worked it out that Shane had some faint streak of the feminine in him. Moreover, Shane did not live for sports, as did Mark, who had constantly to be reminded that life was not all games, and though Eve said it in as many ways as possible, Mark grew very bored by this fact so frequently presented to him. Shane played games because Frank encouraged them and also, she felt, to escape Mark's scorn, but he was obviously a good deal happier teaching Mona to play duets with him ; or helping her to model heads or figures in clay. He could amuse Judy for hours with his queer tricks with a piece of string and the funny faces he would draw, like lightning strokes, upon any odd piece of paper. He could alter a face, too, from a smiling one to a serious ; from serious to gay ; from gay to grotesque—a trick which explained why Judy always manœuvred to sit next to Shane in church and why she objected less than Mark to Eve's rule that they must go at least once a day. ("Mother doing the handsome by the Almighty," as the irreverent Mark put it later, "or by the ancient Sacheverell." At this point it scarcely mattered which, since the result was precisely the same.)

"Shane is curiously like Mona," Eve said to Frank. "They're amused by the same things ; they like the same things, and they'd always rather be daubing about with paint or clay, or trying something over on the piano than doing something really useful. . . . They might be brother and sister. . . ."

Neither had Mark any objections to the new-comer. "Shane's all right," he said. It was the most he found, these days, to say of anybody.

"Mark's holding a watching brief for life," Frank said, "and is afraid that somehow we're going to prevent his doing much with it. I fancy Mark finds us like the maxims in the copy books: we give a tremendously simple appearance to life and Mark doesn't believe that life's a bit simple, but he'd accept it as it is if we'd leave him alone with it."

"We can't leave him alone with it," said Eve, but she, too, was a little concerned that this picture of her eldest-born should so frequently obtrude itself—the picture of a small boy, with frowning brows, constantly revising this theory of the simplicity of life which she placed before him.

Moreover, in the spring of nineteen-seven, life was looking a little complicated, even to Eve Bentley, into whose drawing-room meetings an element of controversy most unwelcome had entered over the policy of open warfare upon a government which would not promise to introduce a measure of female Suffrage. Eve did not agree with Frank nor with Betty Faulkner, the leader of the militant section, that psychologically the women were on sound ground. Nevertheless, she did not sever her connection with the Society. She had walked in the procession that went in the February from Hyde Park to Exeter Hall: she had been told by an anæmic youth to go home and mind the baby and had rather missed the humour of the incident of the large man with a paunch, who took a cigar out of his mouth to observe: "*You're* not so bad, my dear. What are you doing on Sunday?"

Mark simply could not understand what it was about this story which his father found so amusing, but his mother's encounter with Miss Faulkner in the March of nineteen-eight delighted him. Miss Faulkner was a large handsome person, with a round baby face and a mass of dark fluffy hair, which she twisted negligently about her head in a fashion which those who admired it called "picturesque," and those who didn't "untidy." And on this particular occasion she smiled at Mark's mother in the insolent fashion she kept for male interrupters.

"It comes to this, then, Mrs. Norman. You're not prepared to face danger for us?"

turn to smile when Rose said, "Oh, but Mr. Mostyn will be so disappointed if you don't." Not only *Mr.* Mostyn, Mona thought, a little appalled at herself for wanting so much to go, for feeling ever so slightly aggravated because Dickie flung his fractious mood forbiddingly in her path. "Shane *can't* want to see me more than I want to see him. Oh, Dickie, darling, let mummy go."

And Dickie let her. In the last resort Dickie made no protest of any sort. He obligingly went to sleep and remained asleep, even when the taxi came pantingly up the steep climb to the house and Mona stole in to kiss him good-bye; an unusually soundly-sleeping Dickie, indifferent to strange feet upon the garden path, to a strange voice in the hall inquiring about luggage, and to that long kiss his mother came back to repeat. "Tired out with his tantrums," Rose said, shutting the door of the taxi with the air of one who felt herself more than a match for Dickie, which always affected Mona so pleasurably, because she never felt it herself.

Nevertheless, all the way to the station and more than half-way to town, she thought of Dickie in his rosebud sleep and half-wished, even now, that she had not come. But as the train ran into Paddington Station, she could scarcely bear to look at the platform in case Shane should not have come to meet her.

Then she saw that he had.

He came at her like an excited schoolboy, kissed her clumsily and bundled her into a taxi. As they turned out of the station, he twisted her round by the shoulders and looked at her.

"You lovely thing!" he said gravely, and his eyes devoured her. "Glad to see me?"

"Very," she said, but she blinked a little and she could feel her heart thumping madly against her ribs. Also, she found it was a little difficult to control her voice. These things dismayed her, because she had come to believe that she had taught her body discipline. "Are we going home?" she asked.

She had left Devonshire by the seven o'clock train and had

I can't be a doctor . . . I know she *expects* me to be one. One of us must, anyhow."

"Not me, then!" said Mark. "I'm going to be a farmer."

"Oh, Mark! she'll *never* let you be one!"

"She can't stop me, not when I'm grown up. . . . Why can't Judy be a doctor? She doesn't mind it a bit when her finger bleeds: she likes looking at blood."

"Or Shane," said Mona hopefully, "you could be a doctor, couldn't you, p'raps?"

"I'm going to be a musician," said Shane.

"Good Lord! With long hair?" said Mark.

"Or I might perhaps, be a cartoonist . . ."

Nobody quite knew what that was, and the dictionary proved no more satisfactory than Shane's attempt at definition. Then he produced the *Westminster Gazette*.

"That's the sort of thing!" he explained.

Mark surveyed Carruthers Gould's drawing without enthusiasm and without comment. Mona said: "How would you decide which side you were on? I mean, whether you ought to be rude to the Liberals or the Conservatives?"

"Mother would tell him," Mark said. "When I have a vote, I expect I shall ask mother to tell me who to vote for."

And Mark grinned.

"I'm not prepared," said Eve, "to do things which, besides being rather silly and undignified, are also harmful. Neither would it afford me any pleasure at all to go to prison for creating a public disturbance."

"It isn't very pleasant in prison," Betty Faulkner suggested.

"It would be still less pleasant to go there unnecessarily," said Eve, and was grateful to Martha Goss for appearing just then with tea, for which Miss Faulkner found she was unable to wait.

So the word went round that Eve Norman was "unreliable" and her appearances on the public platform, much to her small son's relief, became considerably less frequent.

But Shane, a prisoner already to the ease of the Norman household, accepted this side of Eve's activities as he accepted all others. When Mark said: "Well, it's all right for you. She isn't *your* mother!" only his sense of loyalty to a woman who had kept him awake at night with her crying prevented him from saying: "Don't I jolly well wish she were!" Shane had been fond of his mother, but her tears had bored him and it seemed to him that the people who wanted a vote never wanted to cry. To Shane Mostyn the most wonderful thing about Eve Norman was that he had never seen her in tears. Her cheerful serenity dwelt about him like a benediction.

It was a long while before he began to see what Mark meant when he said: "Mother's all right . . . but you can't always tell her the truth. I mean, it saves so much bother *not* to."

Mona frowned over the problem this view of things presented.

"I know," she said. "But, all the same, when I go to tea with Miles and Greta Anderson, I keep thinking all the time how awful it would be to have *their* mother—worse than having Aunt Sachie." (Mary's name among the irreverent young Normans since they first discovered her trick of having her letters addressed to Miss Sacheverell Bentley.) "I'd hate to have that sort of mother, even if I *didn't* have to worry about making mistakes and about school reports and not doing very well in maths. But it'll be awful to have to explain that

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CHAPTER THREE

MARK was approaching his fourteenth birthday when the blow fell.

But for Mark, it might never have fallen; but for Mark's request, that is, to be allowed to use an old desk of his father's that was standing upstairs "doing nothing" and his explanation that he did not see how anybody could be expected to work with "the Kid," who could not keep quiet and resisted all efforts to show her how the trick was done. "It doesn't seem very fair to the others," said Eve to an assenting Frank, "but it does seem to be Mark who suffers most from Judy's high spirits. As a household we do, rather, want a little overhauling. Do you think you could find time to go through the desk?"

At the end of a week, Mark was still frowning over the fact that his father had not found time.

"Mother, don't you think *you* might go through those drawers?" he suggested hopefully. But Eve demurred.

"Your father wouldn't like us to go through his papers."

"I didn't *say* go through the *papers*. I said go through the *drawers*."

Eve frowned at what she called Mark's tendency to quibble. And Mark frowned at what he thought his mother's readiness to "take anybody up," and because it annoyed him to have it suggested that he was wanting in that nicety of feeling which respected other people's privacy.

"Can't you lift all the things out in a pile and not look at them at all?" he suggested, and it was for all the world as though he added, "*I* could, but p'raps the temptation might be too much for you?"

Which was probably why Eve said firmly, "No, Mark, I'm afraid you'll have to wait."

Nevertheless, each day when he came in from school, he ran upstairs to see if the impossible had happened, and behold! one day it had! There on the floor, were several neat piles of papers and the drawers of the coveted desk standing stark and wide. He ran downstairs two at a time and burst into the drawing-room, where his mother was usually to be found at that time in the afternoon at her desk or with a book. She was there as usual, but neither writing nor reading, and with something very unusual about her appearance, though Mark could not quite decide what it was. He had never seen his mother sitting idle before. Mother doing absolutely nothing—yes, that was certainly unusual.

"Awfully decent of you, mother, to clear out that desk," he said. "Shall I take the papers into father's study?"

Eve looked up from the book she had picked up the merest fraction of a second too late. "No, thank you, Mark," she said. "Let them stay where they are. I have the only ones your father will want to see."

There they were on the table, a neat little bundle of them, tied round with pink tape. Their appearance was somehow a little formidable and too tidy, surely, for his father, who always left his papers about as carelessly as did Mark his school books. ("You and your father," he had heard his mother say, "go through life on the assumption that there's an army of servants following you round. If it weren't for me, you'd never know where any of your belongings were to be found.")

Mark hesitated. "All right, then," he said, and was half out of the door, when his mother called him back. "Mark, if you are going upstairs, will you ask Judy to try to think of some quieter game?"

Beyond doubt Judy ran to noise. To the people who didn't she would say: "When you see me not making a noise you'll know I'm dead. So long as I'm alive I'll be certain to make a noise." And though Mark often said, "That kid ought to be suppressed!" he understood well enough why there were so few volunteers for the task.

"Well? How was I to know mother had a bad head? She never does!" protested Judy. "Mother and I never get ill."

"*Headache? Mother!*" said Mona, presently arriving, as usual, with Shane at her heels. "How rotten! I suppose it isn't a telegram, is it, to say somebody in the family's dying? P'raps it's Gran'pa Bentley. Though I don't see why that should give mother a headache."

Neither did anybody else. Besides, Gran'pa Bentley had made up his mind to live to be a hundred, and Gran'pa Bentley, as everybody knew, always did what he made up his mind to do.

"Mark, got any homework?"

"Done it, all 'cept a beastly essay for old Ryan . . . Ryan's subjects take the cake . . . last week it was: Means of locomotion a' hundred years hence. Fancy giving us that *now*, when they've invented the motor-car and the flying machine. Just wasn't anything to say. And this week it's something out of somebody's poem: 'Unhappy far-off things.'"

"Well, if you'll help me with my surds, I'll do your essay——"

"And have old Ryan spot it at once, like he did before. Not me. Besides, Miles is coming round to play cricket."

"Miles Anderson is a beastly boy," said Judy dispassionately. "He always wants to *kiss* everybody."

"Mona likes being kissed," said Mark. "And she doesn't think Miles is beastly. Besides," he added, with that keen thrust of intuition that Eve, when she encountered it, found so devastating, "Mona doesn't mind if people *are* beastly, if she likes them."

"Here's that boy Anderson walking up the garden-path," said Martha, putting her head in at the door. "Which of you has he come for now?"

"Mona," said Shane.

"Rats!" said Mona politely.

"It's Mark, I'll be bound," said Martha. "Well, come on out, if you've finished your tea. I don't want that young gentleman's dirty feet in my kitchen."

But Miles's face was already grinning over Martha's shoulder.

"I've left the garden outside, really I have," he explained entreatingly. "I scraped my heels on the thingamijig outside and rubbed my feet on the mat so hard I've got a corn."

"Is it Mr. Mark or Miss Mona you've come to see?" asked Martha.

Miles considered.

"I've come to play cricket with Mark," he said, "but if Mona would play too. . . ."

"Oh, cheese it," said a disgusted Mark.

Mona smiled adorably at Miles.

"No, really, Miles, I couldn't. I've lots of beastly homework to do and a duet to practise with Shane."

"Oh, come *on*!" said Mark, who never looked at girls and despised his friends because they did, or rather because they looked at his sister. "Young Norman's pretty sister" was in danger of becoming to Mark "My flirty sister!"

Miles went. Equally adorably Mona smiled at Shane.

"Let's go upstairs and try the duet," she said.

"We can't possibly, if your mother's got a headache."

"We can keep the soft pedal down. Oh, Shane, I simply *must* get that little bit in the middle right. . . . It's so lovely."

They were trying to learn a Sonata of Mozart's.

The sound of voices came from the drawing-room as they went past it to the schoolroom.

"I wonder what's up?"

"Nothing," said Shane. "There never is—here," and the little pause before the final word was eloquent, even to Mona.

"It must be awful to have parents that quarrel," she said, "who hate each other."

"They don't always hate each other," said Shane, "that's just it. Not all the time, I mean. It's much worse that way."

"Didn't your mother hate your father, then?"

"No. Only they couldn't get on. He did things . . . I don't know . . . things she couldn't stand. She left him, you know, but I believe she'd like to have gone back. She used to be unhappy. She used to cry a lot and sometimes she was ill. She usen't to get up for days. It wasn't very nice."

"It must have been awful for you," said Mona.

"It was, rather," said Shane.

They crept on up the staircase.

Behind the shut door, Eve was saying to Frank: "This afternoon I found those letters . . . those on the table behind you . . ."

"Letters? Mine? Those things tied up with pink tape?"

"Letters written *to* you, by your cousin Linda." And she thought: "He isn't even surprised."

He was not, of course. He knew now that he had been waiting all these years for this to happen. Only, somehow, it was so ludicrous it should have happened now, because Eve would not be likely to know that the secret those letters enshrined no longer mattered at all.

"So *that* was where they'd got to?" he said.

He looked as Mark looked when you accused him: not guilty, but as though he were really grateful to you for clearing up a point which had long baffled him; as though he found your revelation and your way of putting it extraordinarily interesting. She knew now that Frank had often wondered what had become of those letters; had looked for them in vain and finally given up the search, had assumed, perhaps, that after all he must, at some time or other, have destroyed them.

And while he stood there looking at them, with that expression on his face which reminded her of Mark, she said: "I'd like you to understand that I never meant to read a word of them. They had slipped to the back, behind one of the drawers and the tape came off when I tried to get them out. Your cousin writes a very bold hand. When I came to tie them up again and smooth them out, I couldn't help seeing . . ."

"You could have helped going on."

"I didn't go on."

"You *haven't* read them?"

"Of course not. I only want you to tell me if that one sentence . . . or its implication . . . is true. I can't believe that it is. Some girls, I know, do use this exaggerated sort of language . . ."

"My dear, we wrote each other so many letters . . . I really can't remember."

"The sentence in question is on the very top page . . . and underlined."

"And the sentence is?"

"Oh, read it, please."

Frank obeyed.

"Quite true," he said.

"Quite true that Linda Forrest was your mistress?"

"For three years."

Eve's face hardened.

"Why wasn't I told?"

"Because I didn't want you to know. It was all over and done with when I met you."

"You ought to have told me. Didn't it ever occur to you that I ought to know?"

"Frequently. I tried, right at the beginning, more than once. But I found you rather terrifying, my dear, in the rôle of Confessor."

"You weren't honest, Frank. You're not honest now. Isn't the reason simply that you were afraid that if you told me I wouldn't have married you?"

"Well, would you have done?"

"I don't think so."

"Then, my dear, you can't really expect me to be sorry I didn't tell you."

He poured out a cup of tea and, whilst he stirred it, helped himself to Martha's thinly-cut bread and butter. "I know you think I oughtn't to do this," he said to Eve, "but, really, I'm astonishingly hungry. I'm too old, my dear, to let my emotions interfere with my appetite." His composure lashed Eve like a whip. Under it, too, something happened, most astonishingly, to her own.

"Oh, how unfair you are!" she cried. "Does it seem to you so strange that I should have minded—that I mind *now*? Do you think women don't, because they've accepted that sort of thing—made the best of it? Would you have married me in similar circumstances?"

Frank smiled.

"My dear, I really can't imagine . . ."

She said, "Oh, please, don't be funny."

"I would have married you, Eve, if you had committed all the crimes in the Decalogue."

He could not blame himself for not taking her seriously, for refusing to help her to create a mountain out of a molehill. And he wanted to smile because she made morality a superstition, a fetish.

"I ought to have been told," she insisted ludicrously, like a child despoiled of a promised "treat."

"I agree," he said. "But does it really matter so very much, now, that you weren't? After all, nobody knew, save Linda and I . . . though Martha Goss may have suspected . . ."

Eve made a quick impatient movement with her hands.

"It's your attitude . . . your explanations . . . you don't *mind* . . . you're not ashamed."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. They were silent for a moment, listening to the sound of the children going past and up the stairs. When he could no longer hear them, Frank said :

"It wasn't, you know, Eve, a very shameful business."

"You can say that?"

"Because I believe it. It was one of those inevitable things that just do happen. We were young and impressionable, and we were thrown together a good deal . . . a good deal too much, very likely. It was in the days when Aunt Blanche had her bungalow on the river at Taplow. We were river-mad; we spent whole days . . . nights . . . on the river."

"Were you in love with each other?"

"Frightfully."

A little spasm passed over Eve's face.

"Then why didn't you get married?"

"It didn't occur to us."

"It didn't occur to you to get married?"

"No, not until some time afterwards. I don't think marriage appealed to either of us, and for very good reasons. I was a hospital student and Linda wasn't the girl to marry a

poor man. She didn't see herself as the wife of a dentist, either; you know, she always found my profession a little amusing. When I discovered that I wanted to marry her, she got rather bored; began to play me off against young Wroxeter, who'd just appeared upon the scene. I didn't take him very seriously, for he was poor, too, in those days, and with two cousins standing between him and the succession. I hadn't bargained for their death in some yachting accident. . . ."

"How old were you when it . . . began?"

"Oh, kids, both of us. I was about twenty-one. . . . Linda must have been about eighteen."

He saw suddenly where his answer had taken him and jibbed away from it.

"My dear Eve," he said, "let us not talk about it. I can't hope to make you understand how it happened, or why it *had* to happen. . . . I know we behaved badly . . . but I didn't know it then. . . . It was just 'mad and bad and glad,' as Browning's sick man says. I wasn't even sorry until I met you. You see, I saw then that Linda didn't matter . . . and I began to suspect that she never *had*."

Again that little painful spasm passing over Eve's face.

"How can you say that? Don't you see that it makes it all the worse? If it was just casual and meaningless."

"Meaningless? Good Lord, no, Eve, it wasn't meaningless. Far from it. It was heaven . . . while it lasted. Can't you imagine a physical passion between two people that has nothing behind it—that just burns itself out?"

She said, "No, I can't imagine that."

He could see she couldn't bear to imagine it. He watched her standing there quite motionless, with that little aloof air about her that hinted not at passion at all, but so unmistakably at distaste. She was staring across at her Madras curtains as though she found them a little vile. Down the staircase, wan and faint, came the first bar of the Mozart Sonata in A Minor, though Eve did not recognise it. Played as Shane and Mona were playing it, with the soft pedal firmly sustained, it had a sad complaining note that accorded with the scene and deepened

Eve's mood of self-compassion. Her little world had fallen about her ears, so that nothing seemed to belong to her; nothing remained real; not the years of her contentment, nor what they had brought her, not that little child who sat in the room above with her music, nor this thing which had happened. . . .

"Eve, this was over and done with before ever I met you. . . . Don't think I haven't regretted. . . . Believe me, if they meet the right woman, all decent men regret. But how does all this affect us—*now*?"

She said, dragging her eyes away from the Madras curtains and looking as though she wanted to stop her ears against Shane and Mona's music, "I don't know. I can't explain. It just does. That's all I know."

"You'll let me tear the letters up?"

She nodded her acquiescence and stood there watching him whilst he did it. She felt that she had never seen him before; he was a stranger, of whom at some time or other she had been shown a photograph, so that, inexplicably, she knew the way his hair grew at the temples and at the nape of the neck, and the line of his thin face in profile and that way he had of imprisoning a smile in his eyes. Oh, but all the other things she knew about him. . . . It wasn't decent she should know them. He was a stranger. She could not talk to him. There was nothing to say. Everything had changed and she wanted everything to be what it had been before—comfortable, happy, decent; quiet roots in deep cool soil.

It seemed to her now that all along he had been playing a part, pretending to be what he was not. Lies had wrapped him about. That hurt, because he had seemed to her so utterly the epitome of all that was sincere and true. She was damaged in her own eyes for that mistake; with her belief in him he had destroyed her belief in herself. That was the really dreadful thing. Her self-pity hardened, but to Frank, glancing at her dumbly while he tore up those letters, her self-possession seemed unbelievable. Only ever so faintly did he guess at the frightened, unhappy Eve behind it, striving desperately to lay afresh the foundations of her life. She had to begin all over

again, and she could not bear it. The look of repugnance on her face disappeared. A line of anguish ran up it and across. Suddenly, it was strangely ravaged, at war. . . .

He went across to her, dragged her up to him by the hands. She did not resist, but she averted her face.

"Eve, can't you see, can't you *see* that there *is* no past . . . that nothing ever happened before I knew you . . . that there simply was no world at all before we met?"

No, she could not see that. She never would see it. The words to her meant nothing, except the casuistic male attempt at self-justification. All she saw at the moment was that those three years with another woman sullied those seventeen with her. Frank did not see that; he never would see it. She wondered if she were ever going to see anything else.

"You must give me time to get used to it," she said, "to this new idea of you. You see, I didn't know that you were . . . like that. I don't expect you to understand."

Strangers . . . who did not speak each other's language. Yet he must needs try again.

"Eve, we're not as young as we were. We're both over forty."

"Does one cease to have standards as one grows older?"

"One should, perhaps, have learned a little toleration."

She smiled.

"Because of our knowledge of other people?"

"No . . . because of our knowledge of ourselves."

He felt her withdrawal like a knife-stab. Understanding seized upon him roughly. No amount of talking would wear this thing down. Only the years and the sorrow of them could do that. She was extraordinarily young in her hardness, in her intolerance. On this business of sex she was where she was when a girl of seventeen, confronted for the first time with the scandal of her father's amours. She simply had not grown up.

"One of us must be wrong," she said a little helplessly.

"*You* are right," he said. "But you are also a little wrong, because you are inflexible. You can't put yourself in anybody

else's place. You simply can't see *why* people do certain things ; you only see that they ought not to want to do them."

She said, "The things they want to do are ugly. . . . They offend me. One must be clean."

Her distaste, her outraged fastidiousness, stood forbidding between them. She could not shut her eyes and forget it.

"Our life together counts for nothing then, Eve?"

She cried out: "No, no . . . you can't wipe a thing like that out ; nothing can, but you can make it look different. There isn't anything you can't spoil."

"And our love? Is that spoiled too?"

"I can't talk about love. Your definition wouldn't, I think, agree with mine."

"You're very hard, you know, Eve."

"I'm sorry, but I can't let go of my convictions all at once. . . . I can't readjust my ideas as quickly as all that. I'm not very adaptable. You must give me time." Then, suddenly, a gust of unexpected emotion demolished her defences. "Oh, what is the use of talking about it? Frank, I can't bear it. This conversation is hopeless. We are losing something with every word we utter."

"It will come back."

"I do not believe it," she said.

Later, when Mark said: "It's saved you a good deal, hasn't it, father, your letting me have this old desk of yours?" Frank put back his head and roared with laughter.

The sound of it floated down to Eve, who sat at her accounts, and as she lifted her head, a twist of the old scorn showed for an instant on her white and weary face.

CHAPTER FOUR

DURING the week that followed, Frank was aware that something had gone out of his life—his life and Eve's. It wasn't that Eve had bad moods, showed temper, made scenes, or was in any way anything but the quite desirable wife and mother he had always considered her. It was something much deeper and subtler than that; some strengthening of the quiet air of sufficiency she carried about with her, some shrouding of the confident spirit, some veiling of that bright Eve he had long known and lived with.

It began two days later, when Frank looked up from his breakfast-table correspondence to say to her :

"Aunt Blanche is in town and wants us to dine with her on Friday. Are we free?"

"I'm afraid I'm not," said Eve. "I'm speaking for Betty Faulkner's meeting that evening."

Frank passed Blanche Forrest's letter across the table.

"I thought you didn't, these days, get asked?"

"This isn't an ordinary Suffrage meeting. It's a protest against the imprisonment of Daisy Townsend."

"Daisy Townsend?" The name hovered on the brink of recollection, until Eve's voice lifted it over the threshold.

"The girl they sent to prison yesterday for murdering her baby."

The usual story. Seduction under promise of marriage. . . .

"Do you think the meeting will do any good?"

"It will at least call attention to the case."

"Which is probably the last thing the poor girl wants."

"You think she really likes being in prison?"

"As much, I imagine, as she likes providing newspaper copy."

Eve darted away from that. She said, "These things can't be pleasant for anybody. But something has to be done. Such cases can't be dropped. We ought to go on demanding that in this business the man stands beside the woman in the dock."

"Quite so; but if the woman refuses to disclose his name or whereabouts?"

Eve rather lost her head. "Pressure should be brought to bear," she said.

"On the woman? A refusal should be made a criminal offence? You won't find that a very popular line to take."

"Popularity is scarcely our object," said Eve, all the martyrdom of generations of pioneers in her voice. "But I do not look for your sympathy. You have defended questionable men so often."

The bitterness in her voice was a little hard to bear. But he did bear it, because he saw how things looked to her. "What she used to call my toleration, my compassion for people who have spoiled things, she sees now, of course, as a fellow-feeling. I couldn't condemn others without condemning myself. My defence of Theodore Mostyn explained. I suppose it does look rather like that. She sees me suddenly and hatefully in the rôle of Special Pleader. Poor old Eve!"

He said: "But this man isn't 'questionable.' He's a cad skulking behind a woman's affection; but I don't see, quite, how you punish him by making things harder for the woman."

He looked at his watch and rose from the table. In ten minutes he had his first appointment. Whatever happened, people went on having the toothache. Frank found the thought amusing, and his smile irritated Eve, so that, a little childishly, she turned away from the kiss he offered. He spoke to her averted face, did not see that the hand that put down the coffee cup trembled so that the white tablecloth was stained.

"Eve," he said. "*Must* it be like this?"

She rose and pushed back her chair.

"It is useless to put the blame on to me . . . it isn't I who've spoiled things."

"Are they so very spoiled?"

"For me, yes. I told you that you must give me time . . . that I couldn't all at once get used to this new idea of you."

"Of me as a 'cad' or merely as a 'questionable' man? It would ease my mind enormously to know definitely how you regard me."

"Oh, you can joke about it! I daresay it *does* seem rather funny to you."

"My dear, it *is* a little bit humorous, isn't it?"

"On the contrary, it affords me no entertainment whatsoever." Behind her amazing ridiculous dignity she was hiding as effectively as she might have hidden behind a coat of chain armour.

Frank laughed.

"And when is it you denounce my kind in public?" he inquired.

Gaps appeared unexpectedly in the armour. Frank repented.

"Sorry. That was rather beastly of me. When's the meeting, Eve?"

But Eve slipped out as Martha Goss came in to clear the table.

"I've an appointment with somebody soon, Martha. Who is it?"

"Mrs. 'Awkins, sir. . . . She ought to be 'ere by now."

"I believe I've forgotten Mrs. Hawkins," said Frank.

"Stout woman, Mr. Frank, who plays the horgin at the tin chapel round the corner."

"It sounds very unsafe. You say she hasn't arrived? Then I may as well have a cigarette."

"There's other people 'ere though, Mr. Frank. There's two pore fellers with 'orrible swollen faces. They really oughtn't to be walkin' about with them. H'abscesses, I expect. I said you'd see 'em after breakfast."

"I'll see one of them in five minutes precisely," said Frank,

and went down to his surgery. Hardly had he shut the door upon himself when Martha opened it again.

"Five minutes I said, Martha," expostulated Frank.

"I ain't forgot. I come to tell you Mrs. 'Awkins has come. Will you see her first?"

"No," said Frank. "Ask her to wait with whichever of the swollen-faced gentlemen you think she'll get on with best, and show the other one in here."

At that moment Eve came down the stairs and past the surgery door. She wore out-of-door attire and an expression which said: "When will you ever learn, I wonder, to treat a servant properly?" She made the barest perceptible pause, glancing up from the glove she buttoned. "I shall not be in to lunch," she said, and went.

"Damn!" said Frank, and nearly slammed the door in the swollen face of the unfortunate young man Martha was leading like a lamb to the slaughter, and who showed a decided disinclination to part from her. Frank murmured an apology and indicated a seat, which the young gentleman took with the air of one who in a difficult world had no longer anything whatever to hope for.

"Open your mouth, will you, please?" said Frank.

Teeth. A useful invention of Providence's. Extraordinary how often teeth kept your mind off other things. That image of a blue-clad Eve standing there buttoning her glove, not looking at him, slipped behind the absurd figure of this sorrowful young man with an abscess at the bottom of one of his quite appalling teeth.

"You'll have to have gas," Frank told him.

Eve was right. It wasn't love which was the business of life. It was teeth. All the same, he wished he had taken that blue-clad figure by the shoulder and made it "see reason."

Eve had not returned when, at four o'clock, Maud Norman came demanding tea. Martha carried a tray into the drawing-room and persuaded Frank to go upstairs and share what was upon it with his sister, who looked at him in her quiet fashion as though he had been one of her patients.

"Where's Eve?" she asked.

"God knows."

"Oh, sorry. Didn't know you and Eve were in the middle of a domestic crisis."

"We aren't. But Eve's suffering from disillusion. It's always rather a trying complaint, I suppose."

"Do you mean that Eve has found out about you and Linda? Of course, I always knew she'd do it some day. If you'd asked my advice, which you didn't, I could have pointed that elementary fact out to you."

"But I didn't even know you knew."

Maud laughed. "Oh, I didn't *know*, of course, but I *suspected* quite a lot. I haven't a nice mind."

"Who else, do you think—suspected?"

"Oh, Martha, perhaps. . . . But not Aunt Blanche. Her mind is a lot nicer than mine. But, of course, the belief that you have produced a couple of plaster saints for children must be decidedly helpful. Anyway, Aunt Blanche never suspected anything more than that you made a fool of yourself over her beautiful daughter. She doesn't really mind that. She'd have been annoyed if you hadn't, I expect. . . . How did Eve find out?"

Frank explained. "I simply didn't remember they were there," he said, "much less that they gave us away."

"And Eve has gone in off the deep end, has she?"

"More or less."

"Over the affair or your failure to inform her of it?"

"Both. . . . And there's something else as well. You see, Eve thinks it was all my fault. Fault would, I think, be the word she would use. She doesn't see that it wasn't anybody's 'fault,' because, according to Eve, *someone* rather than *something* initiates the affairs of the flesh. It's unfortunate for me that Linda is four years younger than I am. It converts me, you know, so far as Eve is concerned, into a seducer of young girls." He laughed.

"Yes," said Maud, contemplating his mirth, "and to one who remembers Linda at the age of seventeen onwards that is certainly rather amusing. What's Eve going to do?"

"Do? Nothing, I hope. . . . But things are damned

awkward at the moment. I don't mean we're chucking the furniture about, but Eve feels she's been cheated; I'm not the man she married, sort of thing. I've lowered the flag; stepped down from the pedestal. . . . That's Eve, you know."

"But not the permanent Eve."

"Eve never forgets things."

"But she can't remember them all the time."

"That's what I'm banking on. At the moment, I comfort myself, she's as much anti-man as she's anti-me. . . . There was always that streak in Eve, you know. . . . Are you going to wait to see her?"

"I've got half an hour to spare. Is she likely to be back by then?"

"I don't know . . . but the kids'll be in soon, anyhow," and Frank took himself off.

Mona came in five minutes later. She was pale and there were dark rings under her eyes, and she didn't want any tea.

"Are you indulging in a headache?" her aunt demanded.

"Only a weeny one, but I'm tired."

"At your age you've no right even to know the meaning of the word."

Mona put her feet upon her mother's Chesterfield and tried to look as though it wasn't the thing she wanted most of all in the world, and as though she wouldn't be told to take them down instantly her mother came in.

"I stayed up late last night, you see, Auntie. No, mother doesn't know. I coaxed Martha not to tell. . . . You see, I had a lot of euclid deductions to do . . . and they *are* so dull, Auntie Maud. I could do them if I kept my mind on them; but I just can't. Mother says I lack concentration."

"And does your lack of concentration explain why you sat up late and produced this horrible result to-day?"

"Well, yes, because if I hadn't stopped to finish the story of the *Young Man with the Cream Tarts* before I began those silly deductions, I'd have been in bed by half-past ten."

"Is it indiscreet to inquire what time you *did* get into bed?"

"Yes, Aunt Maud, I think it is."

"Well, go on with your disgraceful story."

"There isn't much more. I stayed up till . . . whatever time it was, and to-day there was a hockey match."

"What time was that over?"

"Oh, about half-past three."

"And you don't arrive home until five? Do you begin lessons again after your school matches?"

"Not usually . . . only, you see, there was still one deduction to do."

"And you were kept in to do it?"

"Um-m," said Mona. "You see, I leave my maths. so often."

"Aren't you 'let off' things after matches?"

"Sometimes. I think Miss North would have let me off to-day, if I hadn't told her about the 'Young Man with the Cream Tarts.' You see, he isn't in our syllabus. If he'd been Hamlet or Henry IV, it would have been all right."

Aunt Maud agreed that the "Young Man with the Cream Tarts" was a fascinating person, and hinted that she rather thought the gloomy Dane was a neurotic bore, but that that was no reason why Mona should make a neurotic bore of herself.

"I'll keep your appalling secret this time," she said, "so long as you sit up and have something to eat, and promise to get your mother to write letters of excuse whenever you have 'prep.' left over. Now, is that a bargain?"

"Well, p'raps it is, but you know I am really rather dreadful about the maths. I *must* pull up before the Cambridge local. Mother will just hate me to fail."

"Not half so much as I shall hate having an invalid niece who passed with honours."

"Oh, I'm all right, Aunt Maud. But it's a bit awkward mother's being so clever and remembering *everything* she learnt at school. Hardly any of the girls' mothers do that, you know, except the ones who've been teachers. Besides, you know, she took Matric. with honours in maths. when she was eighteen. And hardly *any* woman did that sort of thing

then, of course. I just *can't* fail, Aunt Maud, mother'd never get over it."

"This child's got a headache, if you please, and feels tired," Maud said to Eve, when she came in. "Hadn't she better be sent to bed?"

Eve looked at her little daughter. Pale: those dark grey eyes strangely arrestive. But weren't they always, and when had Mona any colour? It was years since Mona had been ill; it was generally conceded that she had outgrown her delicacy. Eve had steadily resisted Maud's quite frequently thrown-out hint that perhaps, after all, she hadn't. She resisted it now.

"Do you think you'd be better in bed, Mona?" she asked. Mona considered.

"Well, Ju *does* make rather a row in the schoolroom," she said. "P'raps I could lie down on the outside?"

When she had gone, Maud had some things to say to her mother about girls' schools.

"They want too much, Eve, and I'm afraid you don't do anything to discourage them. Home work, special prep. for exams., rehearsals for concerts and sports' matches. And apparently nobody is let off anything. Children working for exams. ought not to play in school matches."

"But, my dear Maud, growing children must have exercise."

"But they want rest after it, and not brain fag. Women who run schools for girls don't seem to have any common sense. The girls of our mothers' generation played no games and were taught nothing—except to tight-lace, which did as much harm as our lessons and games put together. The girls of our generation were allowed to exercise their brains and played no games. They became physical wrecks, and men said: 'Look what education does for a woman,' and du Maurier drew horrible caricatures of them for *Punch*. To-day we work a girl's brain at full pressure and overdo the physical exercise. When will women learn sense? If a delicate girl like Mona is going to play games as strenuously as she does, she ought not to be studying for exams. Something ought to be knocked off somewhere. I wouldn't take risks with Mona if I were you, Eve. Half the women who come to me ruined

their lives when they were too young to know any better, and it seems to have been nobody's business to prevent it. There ought to be a woman doctor at the head of every girls' school and would be if I had my way."

"But Mona never complains."

"She isn't the sort. Well, I've said my say. . . . Been shopping? Bought anything nice?"

"Some frocks for Judy and Mona and one for myself."

"For Friday evening?"

"Probably."

"On the principle that if you're going to be rude about men you may as well look as attractive as you can while you're doing it?"

The colour came into Eve's pale face.

"Really, my dear Maud!"

Maud laughed.

"Oh, it's all right. Don't look so hurt. I only thought that this time it might be not quite so easy to keep the argument . . . impersonal."

"I see," said Eve. "Frank has told you. Did *you* know?"

"Oh, I guessed, long ago. You know, Eve, my mind isn't as nice as yours."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Good heavens! Why *should* I have told you? I always hoped you'd never find out. There's much truth in the statement about ignorance and bliss."

"You think ignorance is good for women?"

"Some sorts of ignorance for some sorts of women."

"*This* sort for *my* sort?"

"I do, rather. You see, there's the sort of women who can bear the truth, and the sort of woman who can't. Wise folk don't tell the truth to the second sort. That's all."

"Your brother married me under false pretences."

"Oh, agreed. But that's so much less important than you think."

"Now look here, Maud. Suppose it had been the other way round?"

Maud laughed. "My dear, I really can't suppose such a

thing. . . . Oh, all right then. It was you who had the 'affair.' Very well, Frank would have forgiven you."

"Perhaps. Would the average man?"

"Probably not, though I always thought Thomas Hardy's hero a bit overdone, and by no means so representative as he's made out to be."

"The fact remains that men do *not* forgive women, but expect to be themselves forgiven."

Maud laughed.

"I know. That is usually it. Men are irrational creatures for all their belief to the contrary. But you mustn't ask for so much. Equality of citizenship? Very likely. Certainly, in fact, in time. Equality of morality? Not yet, anyhow."

"Equality of morality? *Never!*" said Eve. "To be equal with men means stepping down! Women are inherently decenter than men. I've always believed that. I've always known that there's a flaw in the best of them."

A procession of defaulting males filed through her mind: her father, the men with whom he had hunted: Theodore Mostyn and his unsavoury gang. . . . This man Daisy Townsend was sheltering. Frank. . . . Chastity had nothing to do with them, and they could not understand how women felt about it.

Eve's speech on the Friday was a bitter affair.

Frank sat somewhere at the back and listened to it with a mind that flung back to that day, years ago, in Clutton woods, when they had found the rabbit. This was the old Eve, the Eve of the "What beasts men are!" mood. Once again the pity she had for all hurt things came back to the pity she had for herself. She was sorry for Daisy Townsend and angry because some man had treated her badly, but would she have been so sorry or so angry if she did not believe that she, too, had been badly treated: if she did not consider herself an injured woman? There she was, once again, flinging away down the steep slope of her sex-prejudices; but now there was no nicer Eve standing aside with horror and prevision in

her face. She had forgotten that if you ran downhill as fast as all that, horrible things happened to you at the bottom.

Two men in front of Frank, the face of one oddly familiar to him, said the same things differently when Eve had finished her speech.

"Funny thing these clever women are so downright, isn't it? Anyone would think that the woman who has just sat down had never met a decent man in her life."

"Eve Norman, isn't it? She's good, as a rule. She's against the militants, you know. I always thought she had too much common sense for this sort of attitude. She's married to old John Norman's son. You remember old Norman? Decent old boy—a real idealist, but he could see *facts* if you put 'em in front of him, and most of 'em can't. I met the son when I went down to the Hawes Settlement last year to do a ventriloquist turn for them. His three kids had come along to see the show. Charming youngsters."

"Well, you'd think to hear her she'd got hold of an absolute rotter. It's this damned feminine conceit that gets over me. It makes me sick the way these women stick themselves up on pedestals. What they want is a sense of proportion."

Frank crept out.

It seemed to him that Eve was very late and that she looked very white and tired when she came in. He helped her off with her wraps, and stood watching her as she drew off her gloves.

"Eve . . . did I really deserve that speech?"

She didn't look at him. Beneath her pallor sudden colour rose.

"My speech had nothing to do with you," she said.

"I submit it was argued from the personal."

"How do you know that?"

"I know you, my dear."

She looked at him, then, out of eyes very wide and dark and heavily shadowed:

"I don't think you do," she said, and there was that edge in her voice he had not heard for years. And it struck him

now as it had struck him when he heard it first, as something deliberately taken out of it and put back differently.

"You're making a lot of mistakes, you know, Eve," he said.

"Am I? Then that isn't one of them."

"You can't mean to go on with this, Eve."

"With what?"

"With this."

"I don't know what you mean. You can't expect me to show you . . . affection."

"But I do. There's no reason in the world why I shouldn't."

The weary look on her face deepened.

"What is the use of discussing it?"

She picked up her belongings and went to the door.

"I'm going up," she said. "If you're sitting up later, do you mind sleeping in your dressing-room? I'm rather tired and would rather not be disturbed."

Frank stood there, holding the door open for her.

"Righto!" he said. "And thanks for a very entertaining evening."

She looked at him as she passed with that flicker of scorn that he had seen so often during the past week.

"He can be flippant about it," she thought, which was what she found so difficult to forgive. She did not understand that he took her flippantly because he dared not take her seriously. Had he knelt at the penitent stool it was possible she might have extended forgiving hands; he knew that, but some instinct not alone of pride, but of self-preservation, kept him from getting even within hailing distance of any such attitude.

The cards were up Eve's sleeve. He recognised that. What he would not recognise was her implication that God Almighty had put them there.

CHAPTER FIVE

LUCKILY, Eve found, as other women had found before her, that the existence of a young family with inquiring minds and persistent bodily needs, withdrew a certain amount of attention from her own affairs, and made the irremediable grievance unreal to the point of farce. Nevertheless, her scale of values so slowly readjusted itself that there were times when Frank felt that only the steady crescendo of violence which marked the Suffrage campaign of nineteen-eight, kept her out of the ranks of the militants. An Eve with less sense of personal dignity would have gone in, as Maúd put it, "from the deep end," and though Frank agreed with the noble lord who asserted that it was a law of political evolution that no great advance in human freedom can be gained except after the display of some kind of violence, it was difficult not to agree also with Eve when she said: "Acton was talking about men: political agitation on the part of women never entered his head. But if we depended upon the argument of physical force, we might all be bundled back into the harîm to-morrow."

And while Frank smiled at the incongruity of the thought of Eve in a harîm, Judy demanded what it was and how you spelt it. Eve settled the problem of orthography with a finality scarcely warranted by the dictionary, but hedged over the question of definition.

"You're not old enough yet to understand," she said, and Frank laughed.

"You underrate the child's intelligence, my dear Eve. An harîm, Judykins, is the name of the place in which, were I an Eastern gentleman, I should keep my wives. Eastern gentle-

men, you know, have quite a lot of wives. Those of us who live here in the West are supposed to have only one."

"And what," said Judy, "do you call the place where Mummy'd keep all her husbands, if she was an Eastern lady?"

"Oh, it wouldn't work that way. You see, though the Eastern gentlemen have several wives, Eastern ladies have to manage with only a part of a husband . . ."

"I don't think it's fair," said Judy. "If I were an Eastern lady . . ."

"But you aren't, darling, and neither am I," interposed Eve, "so let us not contemplate their unhappy lot."

"But do *all* the Eastern ladies have to live together," said Judy, "and not any men at all—ever?"

"That is the idea, rather," said Frank.

"Well, *that* part of it wouldn't be so bad. I think girls are much nicer than boys . . . I do really, daddy."

"So does Mummy, and so do I."

Judy laughed.

"Mona doesn't," she said. "Mona *loves* boys. She knows heaps. Yesterday she came home with *six*, counting Miles and Shane. I think boys are soppy. When I grow up I shall go and live in a harim."

"Thank you, Judy, that will do," said Judy's mother.

"And I'll ask the *nice* men I know to come and stay with me."

"That will *do*, darling."

An unappreciated Judy collected her belongings and departed, and Eve said to Frank, "I wish you'd speak to Mona about running about the streets with a retinue of male attendants. I disapprove of it. She's assimilating all Greta's bad habits, it seems to me."

But Frank backed from the horrid proposition with alacrity. "I should bungle it most horribly," he said. "The kid'll begin 'explaining the situation,' and you know I always find her 'explanations' so confoundedly unanswerable."

Eve said, "Very well" in the way she always did say "Very well" to Frank's confession of failure to resist the deplorable

tendency of his offspring to wheedle and coax; but also with some little additional accent, as of one talking to someone she knew scarcely at all, or knew, perhaps, too well. And though Frank was growing used to the accent he was not growing resigned to it, nor had he yet deluded himself into believing that the ground was not cracking beneath his feet. And sometimes he wondered what was going to happen when, and if, the solid earth really gave way, when, undeniably, the chasm yawned at their feet. Were they going to topple in and be dragged under—or would the miracle happen?

And strangely enough the miracle did happen—in the shape of a bad accident to Mona at gymnasium, which resulted in a concussion so severe that for days her life was despaired of. In that white and frightening stillness, so horribly like death, that afternoon in the previous March seemed to belong altogether to some previous existence. In that little room of crisis the sense of injury slipped from Eve like a discarded garment: it was impossible to cherish any irremediable grievance, any active grudge against this man who shared her vigil, who suffered as she suffered, and yet was capable of little kindly acts of self-effacement as though he suffered nothing. So did the chasm slowly opening between them as slowly draw together and was presently bridged over so that one might walk the old ways again with security.

Only Frank learned the truth about that fall in the gymnasium.

"It wasn't *really* Miss North's fault," Mona, a white vision of fragility, told him. "She didn't *make* me take the high jump, but she said that if I didn't I'd have to stand out of the display, because it would mean that I couldn't be relied upon. Of course I'd done it before, but it used to hurt every time—not hurt *me*, but something at the back of me. I used to feel sick, just the very second before, and then I did it."

"And it was never worth it?"

"Not until mother said, 'Excellent!' or 'Splendid!'—then it was. You know, father, I just can't bear it when mother says: 'Darling, you have disappointed me very much.'"

But I don't suppose she ever says that to you, does she?" Mona sighed. "Of course, mother's splendid, daddy, but she does expect such a *lot*."

"It is a little difficult, I admit, to live up to mother," Frank said, "but perhaps it's very good for us. . . ."

"Father, what's an 'ampersand'?" Mona asked suddenly.

"The sign for the little word 'and'—like this." He traced it for her with his finger. "Haven't they taught you that at school?"

"I expect so. I forget. I heard mother using it the other day. I had to pretend I knew."

Frank laughed. "At school they used to say—no, not when I was a boy, much longer ago than that, when Grandpa Bentley was a boy, I expect—'x, y, z and ampersand.'"

"It's a lovely word. Why don't they say it now?"

"Ask me another," said Frank, and Mona smiled her appreciation of this human comforting father, who was always so willing to confess his ignorance. Father, no two ways about it, was a tremendous relief from mother, who knew everything, or who certainly gave you the impression that she did. Mother was never content to say, quite simply, "I don't know. . . ." If she really didn't, she put you off rather cleverly, and then went away and looked it up and later hurled a mass of facts at you which left you breathless. Never this frank confession of blindest abysmal ignorance; no smiling, charming, "Ask me another."

"Daddy, I *do* like you. . . . I like men *better* than women. . . . I can't help it, daddy, I do."

Mona, well over her convalescence, went to what her mother called a "new-fangled" school of her aunt's finding, where nobody worked for examinations or ever did anything by way of athletics more strenuous than Swedish exercises. Mona had done with junior and senior locals and would not sit for Matriculation. That was the first real disappointment of Eve's parental life.

The second came much later, when Mark, at seventeen, sat for Matriculation and failed.

"Well, hang it all," Mark defended himself, "father didn't pass first time, anyhow."

"This is the first time I've ever heard that," said his mother.

"Well, I don't suppose he'd dare to tell you," Mark said.

"Fact, all the same." And Mark grinned.

Nineteen-twelve witnessed the deplorable failure of Mark's second attempt at Matriculation and his initiation into the mysteries of a London shipping office. Mark, to his mother, had become "a nice boy, intelligent but not clever and with no ambitions of any sort." She seemed to imagine that he really liked the shipping office because he voiced no desire in any other direction. She did not count those old childish aspirations to follow in Grandfather Bentley's footsteps. Mark himself seemed to have forgotten them. They were bred, Eve had always felt sure of it, from long stays at Clunbury Hall and the Lincolnshire farm, and indicated nothing whatever.

Nineteen-twelve, beside other excitements of strikes, suffragette disturbances, murders and the Balkan War, provided a mild sensation for Bayswater in the shape of Greta Anderson's marriage to a certain Reuben Mardinor, of whom Eve did not altogether approve, but whom Mona professed to find amusing. In nineteen-twelve, too, Shane achieved his twentieth birthday, his small income passed into his hands and he went off to Leipsic for a year to study music. After the first few weeks no letters came from him until the end of the year, when he announced that he was coming home in the early Spring, that he was going to share a flat with someone he had met in Leipsic and that he had written a novel.

"A novel?" said Eve, "but I thought he went to Germany to study music?"

"So he did."

"Then why doesn't he do it?"

"He says he's found out that he can't play well enough."

Eve shrugged her shoulders.

Shane got back in the Spring, leaner and browner and subtly different. He brought with him the MS. of a novel and a little sheaf of songs which he called "An Elizabethan Song

Cycle," which Mona copied out in her beautiful script and renamed "Shane Mostyn's Farewell to Music." Shane spent a gloomy week over the MS. then collected his belongings, and took himself off to Chelsea.

"What do you suppose that young man's been up to?" Eve asked Frank, who said, "He's had a bad time, somehow. That decision about his music, for one thing. That must have cost him something. Does it occur to you that he looks older?"

"It does," said Eve, and gave Frank the impression that other things had occurred to her, too.

Mona saw nothing except that to the old brother-and-sister relationship which had existed between them something had undeniably happened. But what? Shane was quieter, less eager to talk, to play or practise things at the piano, not a scrap anxious, in fact, as Mona put it "to do any of the old things with just me."

"Nonsense," said Eve to a mild paraphrase of this summing-up of the situation. "Shane has grown up, and so, very nearly, have you." She was glad, for this reason, that Marne House saw but little of Shane, these days, for she did not want Mona betrayed into any of the sentimental or romantic situations which seemed to lie in wait for girls as pretty as she, nor into a marriage like Greta's. Some day, of course, she would marry, but not for years, and not Shane Mostyn, not the son of Theodore Mostyn. She could not see how the son could escape *all* the things she had found detestable in the father. And whatever else Shane had escaped he had not escaped the "artistic temperament," which Eve saw only as the too-frequent polite excuse of one sort of waster. If you had temperament much was forgiven you—but not by Eve Norman.

The next year, when Mona went to the Slade, Eve was aware of something fugitive and shy that hung like a veil between her daughter and herself. "I don't understand her," Eve thought, but was consoled by the serious fashion in which she was beginning to take herself and her studies. This, after all, was the way of life she had chosen, and there *were* artists who earned money at their profession. That was all Eve knew

about it—that there was Art which Paid and Art which Didn't, and which was worth while and which was not.

Eve's ambitions, these days, were not on Mona at all, but on Judy: but it was certainly not Judy she yearned after. Judy could look after herself. Whatever happened, she felt, Judy would always be able to do that. Why was it that so continually she received the impression that Mona, perhaps, could not?

She saw her, these days, as completely given over to Art, to queer new friends, and hopelessly susceptible to her emotions. More and more it became obvious that the clean-cut world with its simple, common-sense problems in which her mother lived was one in which Mona never set foot for a moment. Occurrences like the Senghenydd Pit disaster prostrated her intelligence and frayed her nerves.

"Mother talks as though these things can be altered with a phrase," she complained to Mark, who said, "Not only mother. The whole world relies on phrases. That's what's the matter with it. The only real tyranny on earth is the tyranny of words."

"Then why add to them?" asked Shane. "Much better come out and hear some music."

But Mona went on adding to them. Going out with Shane was not what it once was. She said to Mark: "Look at the things—the wildly impossible, fantastic things mother writes down beneath the phrase 'Votes for Women.' *Of course* I believe that women should have votes, but every time I go to one of mother's meetings I get put off. Instead of seeing more clearly why women should have votes I began to see why they should have ever so many other things and why men should have them, too, which, you know, Mark, mother doesn't see at all. She does think that the world is all right for men, and I don't think it's all right for anybody, as it *is*."

"Well, talking about it won't alter it," said Mark, "everybody talks too much."

"I know," said Mona, and went on doing it. "The other day Mrs. Anderson said she thought it dreadful that a girl like me should be allowed to stand at the Marble Arch *even for*

five minutes selling *The Vote*, and mother laughed and said—you know that confident way of hers—‘Oh, not for a girl brought up as Mona has been!’ D’you know, Mark, if ever I do anything mother would hate very much I shall have to throw myself into the Thames. Mother’s such a terrible responsibility.”

Mark laughed at that.

“But that’s exactly what she isn’t,” he cried. “Don’t I wish she were! If she’d only do something silly just for once! That’s what’s the matter with mother—she’s so damned efficient. Whatever you do, by contrast you seem a fool. I’d have got through Matric. all right if I hadn’t been put off by remembering that mother got through all those years ago with honours in maths. . . . If I told her that she wouldn’t understand. . . .”

Mona sighed. “Ah well,” she said, “mother will have to make up on Judy.”

In their hearts, perhaps, they both envied Judy, who was bright and hard like a jewel, and was doing all the usual things at the usual sort of school with an air of suggesting that they really didn’t matter at all. But curiously enough it was that very quality of hardness which concerned Eve most when she considered this youngest of her children. The thing she had striven for in herself and failed to achieve, disturbed her already in Judy. She did not know that, ever so faintly, she resented it. Neither did she know that she wanted to take it away and give it to Mona.

“An exceptionally happy and united family,” people said of them, and the family itself never doubted it. Yet to Frank it was sometimes as if Eve moved beside him in shadow. Even now there were times when he might catch on her face a look as of one who stood surveying the wreck of her illusions; and somehow or other that made him want to smile, because Eve as a figure of tragedy was never very convincing. Linda’s name was never mentioned between them and when other people mentioned it Eve’s face gave nothing away. Only that slight suggestion of withdrawal, of having no interest whatever

in the conversation and upon Frank's part that faint vague impression of life with a shadow. . . .

When Blanche Forrest died at the close of nineteen-twelve Eve refused to go to the funeral. "I will not meet that woman, Frank," she said, and looked as though she thought he was being very heartless when he said that it was by no means certain that "that woman" would find time to go to her mother's funeral. Linda, of course, had become an anti-suffragist, and believing that woman's place was the home went on to the public platform to prove it. "And when she isn't on a public platform she's in somebody else's home," said Maud Norman. "She always was. . . . That's the amusing part about this Woman-in-the-Home propaganda. A woman may go out of her home to play bridge, to flirt, to dance, to gossip, or to poke her nose into the private affairs of the poor—but directly she goes out of it for something really useful there's a row."

It was Judy who "supposed" that second-cousin Linda's views on the suffrage explained why she never came to see them. And Mark who laughed, "*Our* ideas!" he said. "Mother's ideas, you mean! But, my poor child, you've a lot to learn. Her ladyship Linda doesn't visit us because she's a snob and we're poor relations."

"Poor, but scarcely relations, surely," murmured Mona.

"Didn't she even speak to you, daddy?" Judy inquired.

"Oh, yes, once—a long time ago."

"And not to mother?"

"Well, you see, there wasn't mother in those days."

"Oh, as long ago as that."

"Quite. And things that happened as long ago as that don't matter, do they, Judykins?"

"Well, they can't matter *much*, I should say."

"Do you think you could make your mother believe that?"

"Doesn't she?"

"I don't fancy she does, somehow, you know."

"Judy, darling, I want you. . . . Don't frown like that when I speak to you. Upstairs on my dressing-table you'll find. . . ."

CHAPTER SIX

GARTH MANISTRE, the young man Shane had met in Germany, and whose studio in Chelsea he had left Marne House to share, wore expensive clothes and a nonchalant manner. He was as tall as Shane, but not lean and not brown. His face was broad, his chin square : he had a shock of hair that had a strong tendency to curl and a fair skin of the kind that freckles slightly, but does not tan. He also had plenty of money, was going in for architecture and obviously had a large number of friends and relations who intended to keep him busy designing houses for them. The first time Eve met him he talked so seriously to her of his ambitions in this direction that she was a little surprised to discover that he, too, dabbled in paint and music. But architecture was a good sound sort of profession to have, even without the wealthy friends and relatives, and against painting and music, considered as hobbies, Eve Norman had nothing whatever to say.

And on the occasion of that first visit it was to Eve Norman that young Manistre devoted himself, seeming scarcely to notice Mona, who wandered about the room with cake in one hand, a cup in the other, looking at sketches and saying nothing at all until, just as they left, "Oh, I haven't seen anything at all yet. Can't I come again?"

"Whenever you like," said Manistre, "we keep open house. Drop in any evening after seven. We'll take great care of her, Mrs. Norman."

So did Mona slip naturally into unpremeditated visits to the studio in Chelsea, visits about which she volunteered little.

information and which Eve learned to take for granted. After all, this was part of the life Mona had chosen, and it was difficult to treat her any longer as a child. She would soon be eighteen, and with her fair hair newly "up" looked far maturer than her years. Eve bowed to the inevitable. Besides, hadn't she *wanted* her children to grow up?

Nothing prepared her, however, for the announcement Mona made one afternoon early in the New Year, nineteen-fourteen. She opened the door of her mother's room, shut it quickly, stood with her back against it and said: "Mother, I'm engaged to be married. . . ."

Eve looked up from the correspondence of some Welfare Society for which she was secretary, with only the very faintest wrinkling of her fine, still smooth brow.

"My dear child," she said, "isn't this a rather feeble imitation of a joke?"

Mona took off her hat, threw it on to the Chesterfield and moved away from the door, pushing up the soft waves of hair that the hat had crushed. To the beauty of that familiar gesture even Eve—far less susceptible than anybody else to Mona's loveliness—was not blind.

"I'm not trying a new sort of joke on you, darling. I really *am* engaged."

Eve went back to her correspondence. "May one inquire to whom?"

"To a man called Harrison—Paul Harrison."

Still writing, Eve said: "We have heard of him, but scarcely as a suitor for our daughter's hand."

"Oh, mother darling, don't talk as if you were a reincarnation of Queen Victoria," said Mona, and sat down weakly on the Chesterfield beside the hat, as though she, too, were a little overwhelmed by her piece of news—as though it startled her, set down like that in cold words, as much as it startled her mother.

Mona, in the last few months, had come to know so many young men that it was not at all an easy matter for Eve to disentangle Paul Harrison from their midst, which Mona did seem to understand, since she said helpfully:

"Mr. Harrison is the young man who has been painting my portrait."

"He seems to have made most excellent use of his time. When did this thing happen?"

"My promise, you mean? This afternoon. So you can't say I've kept you in the dark for long."

"In the dark! My dear child, didn't you *know* this young man was going to propose to you?"

"How should I have known?"

"Do you mean to say that he hasn't made his . . . his attitude to you apparent long before this?"

"Been making love to me, you mean?" Mona considered that. "I see *now* that that *was* what he was doing. But if you wrap it up in books and paint it is a bit difficult to recognise, you know."

"And you allowed it?"

"Allowed? Mother darling, you don't know Paul Harrison." Eve smiled.

"You seem to have taken good care that I shouldn't," she said. "When am I to have that pleasure?"

Mona got up from the Chesterfield and, coming over to her mother, took the pen out of her hand and put it beyond her reach.

"Don't talk like that, you histrionic woman, you. You're not Bernhardt or Duse. Can't you realise how horribly *scared* I am?"

"Then you must take back your promise."

"But why?"

"Because you obviously don't love this . . . Paul Harrison."

"But how do I know I don't? How can one possibly tell? I thought when a man kissed you, you knew. That's why I let him. . . . And you don't. At least, I don't."

"My dear child. This promise must be taken back. Your father will see him for you. You need endure no unpleasantness. He will explain that he took you at a disadvantage."

"But, you know, mother, I don't think he did. Honestly, it was all right while I was there. . . . It was walking downstairs and standing up inside the bus and having to tell you.

It was real enough before. . . . And I really do like Paul. He's very handsome, you know, and huge—as tall as Mark, but broader. . . . He talks most awfully well. . . . He's extraordinarily stimulating to be with."

"I may be old-fashioned," said Eve, "but it seems to me that none of these things supplies a sufficiently adequate reason for marrying the gentleman."

"I know," said Mona. "I feel like that, too, about it."

"Well, we won't waste any more time on the subject now. You must break it to your father when he comes in. Hand me my pen. . . . I must finish my letter."

Mona reached for the pen, but kept her hand upon it.

"Mother," she said, "when you were young, didn't you find men awfully disturbing?"

"Men? At seventeen? I had other things to think about! I should have supposed that you had, too!"

Mona smiled.

"Well, I'm sure they found *you* disturbing, anyhow, darling. You must have been lovely at seventeen."

"Your adjectives are invariably ill-judged," said Eve. But she smiled, obviously unable to take this thing at all seriously. *Of course* Mona wasn't engaged! Girls did not get engaged in that casual fashion . . . not a girl like Mona, anyhow. Parents counted for something, even in 1914. "Give me my pen and leave me in peace," she said.

Mona pushed the implement through the soft waves of her mother's hair, so like her own but for the colour.

"Your hair's lovely, anyway," she said. "You know none of us has hair half as beautiful. Red hair—this deep bronze sort—is so gorgeous . . . it was mean of you not to have passed it on to one of us. And not a single grey hair yet. . . . You must have been awfully happy, mother, to look so young. . . . I wish I'd known you at seventeen. . . . All right, I'm going."

When the door closed after her, Eve sat there doing nothing at all with the pen, while over the hills of time there came faint, enticing, a little wistful, a memory of the young boy who had gone out to Burmah with Clive and been killed. She

had been very rude to him, she remembered, and he had not minded a bit. She supposed he had found her "disturbing." . . . Bah ! she was becoming sentimental at fifty-one ! She had not cared *tuppence* about Harry Dirx. And she did not in the very least believe that Mona cared for this young man to whom she had made this outrageous promise. It was not Paul Harrison who worried Eve, but what Mona had said about the sex to which he belonged. Mona was so lovely that men, of course, would be certain to find her "disturbing," because men, so obviously, were like that : but that Mona should find *men* disturbing—no, Eve was certainly not prepared for that.

Suddenly, she dipped her pen in the ink and began to write very fast.

Paul Harrison duly made his appearance at Marne House, and was promptly given to understand that whilst no thought of an engagement could be sanctioned between him and Mona, there was no sort of objection to their continued friendship. So Paul came fairly regularly to Marne House. He was certainly good-looking and certainly "huge," and it was Judy who pointed out that he had eyelashes that curled.

"Such a horrible waste on a man," she said, and Eve, though she laughed, said that was not at all a nice remark for a modern girl to make. But even the eyelashes did not prevent Mr. Harrison from becoming rather a joke.

His picture began it—his outrageous terrible portrait of Mona. They were as polite as they could be whilst the artist was present, but they certainly let themselves go about it when he had departed.

Mark, unusually loquacious, said : "You look as though you've been on a farm for six months and are now deciding whether you'll feed the pigs or milk the cows."

Eve said : "Of course, I simply shouldn't have known it was Mona."

Frank said : "I daresay it's interesting technically, eh Mona ? I confess I don't know enough about this new school to say."

Judy, who thought she did, said: "It isn't her face he's painted, daddy. It's her soul."

Presently Shane came in and pointed out that a portrait could be quite clever and interesting even if it were not very like the sitter, which Eve said was arrant nonsense. Then Judy began again about Mona's soul, and Mona said: "Oh, come off my soul Ju, you're spoiling the look of it."

"Couldn't," said Judy, "if it's anything like what Mr. Harrison imagines."

So it was quite early that Paul Harrison became a joke in the family circle.

"Of *course* she'll never marry him," Eve said. But when she was feeling less confident about it she tried to draw Shane, who came these days even less frequently to Marne House and was obviously not very willing to be "drawn." Nevertheless, he managed to be rather consoling.

"What does she see in him, Shane? Can you tell me?"

"Well, he's very good-looking."

"In a way that doesn't matter."

"It may matter to Mona."

"I don't believe it. Well, what else?"

"He's young."

"So are you. But she doesn't fancy herself in love with you."

The colour showed for an instant beneath Shane's brown skin. Then he smiled.

"That is so," he agreed.

"Your reasons so far," said Eve, "don't seem very adequate."

"This is the really adequate one. He has cheek."

"You think Mona really likes 'cheek' in a man?"

"Oh, she doesn't recognise it as that, of course. It seems to her like courage and self-confidence. His certainty attracts her—because certainty, about anything at all, is hardly Mona's strong point. Harrison's sure of himself and his talent in a way that Mona will never be sure of herself or of anything whatever . . ." He stopped and again that tinge of unusual colour showed for an instant beneath the brown skin. "It's all right,

Mrs. Norman, don't worry. I give him three months—in which to come off his perch. . . .”

That conversation took place in February. It was in the middle of May that Mona informed her parents that they had seen the last of Paul Harrison “as a suitor for our daughter’s hand.”

“Have you quarrelled?” asked Eve.

“Nothing to quarrel about,” said Mona. “I’ve just told him I’ve stopped wanting to be engaged to him and that it gives me a pain to have him about.” The light tone of badinage told Eve what a child she was, how little she understood of the whole affair, but it told Frank more than that. It told him that Mona was a little puzzled at herself and a little ashamed.

“I shouldn’t make a habit of this sort of thing,” said Eve. “I hope it has taught you a lesson.”

Mona said nothing. But that evening she took her father for a stroll in Kensington Gardens and sat down with him beneath the trees.

“Father, do you think I’ve behaved very badly?”

“Very wisely.”

“In sending Paul away, you mean? But badly, I meant, in ever allowing him to think I cared?”

“But p’raps you thought you did?”

“I think I did, father . . . I thought it *was* real, that time.”

“*That* time? Has Paul really had predecessors?”

“No, not really—but nearly. I know an awful lot of men, daddy, one way and another. . . . They’ve all been fairly . . . disturbing.”

“They’ve all wanted to kiss you?”

“Oh, not only that. . . . They do, of course, but I can’t imagine why they should imagine *I* want them to. I wish I could find out what it is about me that makes them think that I won’t mind. . . . I treat them all just—well, quite nicely—and then, later, it turns out that they’ve remembered something I said most casually, and have built a whole castle of

silliness upon it. Daddy, that sort of thing really *is* disturbing."

"I can well believe it."

"They left me alone when Paul came . . . sort of gave me up to him. It made me feel like a parcel from Whiteley's, wrongly delivered. . . . However, Paul was a relief. I sort of sat down and took my bearings. . . . But, father, wouldn't it have been awful if I'd *married* Paul?"

"Yes, it must be pretty awful to marry the wrong man."

"Or to fall in love with him. That does happen, you know, father."

"I shouldn't think of disputing it."

"But mother would. You can't imagine mother making a mistake of that sort."

Frank smiled.

"Your mother has a most uncanny gift for distinguishing the real from the counterfeit," he said. "It's a thing most of us acquire. Your mother was born with it. That makes it so much more deadly."

"I do envy the positive people," Mona said. "That's why I liked Paul. He always knew: he never had any doubts. And I have. I swim about in a sea of 'em, and the little bit of beach goes on getting smaller and smaller. There just isn't anywhere to land. I suppose I can't have any character. Is that it, do you suppose?"

"It isn't the sort of character you buy, ready-made, anyhow. You've got to beat it out on an anvil. It'll come gradually—like chipping a head out of marble. (Tried that yet?) It takes some of us a long time to find ourselves—to find out what we want and if it's worth having. And getting anywhere matters a lot less than we think it does. What does matter is *how* we get there—cheering up the others and helping those who fall out and carrying a buoyant, hopeful spirit."

And Mona said, for all the world as though she hadn't been listening: "Oh, daddy, I'm going to make such a lot of mistakes. Paul's only the beginning."

It was getting late when they got back to the house and there was a letter for Mona.

"From Greta Mardinor," she said, breaking the seal, and then, presently, "Oh, she's gone to a place called Latchmere . . . Reuben has taken a house there. She wants me to go down for Whitsun, father."

"Would you like to go?"

"I'd rather hope for a fine day and go on the river with you."

"You've forgotten. I've promised to take Judy to Five-ways." Mona remembered. Judy's first long cycle ride. "Of course you can come, too."

"No thanks, Grandfather Bentley would be a bit too much for me at the moment. I don't suppose mother will be looking for something to do or somebody to do it with, so I may as well go to Greta."

"You don't seem very keen on it."

"Don't I?" Mona fidgeted with the letter. "Do you think Greta's there alone? I mean, it isn't the sort of place you come up from every day, is it, Latchmere?" She put Greta's letter back into its envelope with an air of sudden decision. "Oh, well, perhaps I can stand Reuben for a week-end."

"Is he a bore?"

"No, that isn't the word—and yet he *is* boring in a way. I suppose he's . . . provocative. He never forgets you're there. D'you know? You simply can't be natural. In a way, it's how the studio talks when it's feeling bucked, and in another way it isn't, because the studio likes doing it and knows it doesn't mean anything."

"And does it mean something with Reuben Mardinor?"

"Probably not. Not on my part, anyway, except that he seems to expect it, and I'd hate him to think me a bread-and-butter miss. Do I sound very wicked and flirtatious?"

"I am inclined to apply the last adjective to friend Mardinor."

"I suppose he is. . . . He likes to make an effect on a girl. He's like a dog. He wants to be noticed. But you can't think how nice it is to come back to you and Shane."

"Ah yes, Shane."

"But I put you first."

"I noticed that. It was thoughtful of you."

"You needn't pretend you're jealous. After all, darling, I do kiss you occasionally."

"And you don't kiss Shane at all?"

"Lord, no, we abandoned it when we grew up."

"I see. Quite a recent renunciation."

"Don't be beastly, darling. I'm not the kissing sort. . . . And to kiss without any reason, like Reuben Mardinor, is so boring."

"You think that he really does kiss without reason?"

She opened wide eyes.

"Oh, yes. . . . He's all right, you know, just silly. . . . It hasn't mattered before, very much, but I'd hate it now. . . ."

"Now?"

"Now that Greta's going to have a baby."

"I see. . . . Will she like that, do you think?"

"The baby? Why, of course," said Mona, and there was a new very tender look upon her face, as she stood there, putting Greta's letter back into its envelope.

"I can't disappoint her," she said. "Though I think I would if you hadn't dedicated your day to Judy."

"And what's Shane doing?"

"He's going to something or other with Garth. . . . It's a long while since Shane and I went out together. . . . not since he came back from Germany. There'll be nobody at the studio, anyhow."

"Come out and look at the apple-tree in the moonlight," said her father. "Isn't it a pretty sight?"

"Pretty!" said Mona at his side.

He heard her draw in her breath.

But what she said had nothing to do with the apple-tree or with its beauty. She said: "You know, father, I can't help being *grateful* to Paul. . . . He's *taught* me something."

"Yes. . . . we owe a lot to these men—and women—we thought we loved. Come, I don't think you're paying any heed to the apple-tree."

Frank went down to Liverpool Street—that gloomiest of stations—to see Mona, with a suit-case and a sketching block,

off to Latchmere. Frank had caught a cold admiring the apple-tree and Mona was worried.

"Do go home, parent, and be careful!" she said. "I wish I could trust you to obey me. You know mother never takes any notice of colds: she hates us to get one. We all do."

Frank laughed. A cold was a nuisance and he was inclined to resent it, because colds were things he prided himself upon not getting. If you had enough fresh air and enough cold baths, you need never have a cold, was a dictum of Marne House, where nobody regarded a cold and everybody was scornful of the unfortunate creature who made hay of the dictum. But because Mona seemed to take this particular cold so seriously, he promised not to go down that evening to the Settlement, but instead to go to bed early and drink hot lemon. "And make myself a very great nuisance to your mother," he added. "But there's Judy's ride on Whit-Monday. I must be better for that."

"If you're not, Judy can go by train. Does a fond parent expect letters?"

"He does indeed. Long ones."

"What about my sketches?"

"Won't there be time for both?"

"There shall be, darling."

She was very young and fresh, hanging there out of the train in that dirty station, the faintest touch of colour in her pale cheeks, her hair tucked beneath a small soft hat and escaping in little tendrils that blew free in the windy air. Her father loved her and all the obviously admiring glances of the passers-by.

"I *hate* leaving you, parent," she said. "I *don't* feel you can be trusted to look after yourself."

"I hate being left," said Frank. "Don't you dare to stay longer than a week, and keep Reuben and his kisses at a safe distance. I'm jealous."

"Oh, *kisses*," said Mona, with a little grimace, as though she were remembering Reuben's.

"Liverpool Street makes me feel frightfully homesick," she said. "And yet I suppose people go to quite nice places from Liverpool Street."

"Oh, rather!" He enumerated them for her. "Cambridge, the Fen country, the Broads, Holland. . . ."

She said: "I know. But I can't believe it. It's like the end of the world to me. We shall just run into a black tunnel and stay there. Oh, we're going already. It's a vice in any railway company to be as punctual as all this." She hung round his neck, idiotically. "Good-bye, darling . . . Be sure you make mother have a proper respect for that cold. And come to meet me on Saturday. . . . I'll write what train."

She was gone. Her last vision of him was of a tall man in a loose grey suit, holding his new straw hat with ridiculous care and smoothing his ruffled hair. She thought: "Poor darling! I must have been rough," and then, "Funny that mother's never been able to make him wear better clothes. . . . I'd have taught him long ago that straw hats don't go with his type of beauty. . . . But I love him shabby and loose like that. And those thin aquiline faces . . . I love them, too."

Then a face rose before her that was neither thin nor aquiline, but thick and broad, a dark thick skin, coloured on the cheekbones. . . .

Reuben. . . .

Her thoughts went off down a fresh avenue.

"Oh, I hope he won't be there, or will go *immediately* after the holiday."

The thought of him oppressed her, like the memory of a bad dream.

BOOK IV

MONICA

CHAPTER ONE

REUBEN was there at the station with his newly purchased two-seater. He was very debonair as to manner, carefully careless as to clothes and obviously delighted to see Mona. One little bit of her, as usual, found him attractive: all the rest of her was engaged in wishing he would sit a little farther away and not call her attention to trifling things they passed by the gentle but persistent pressure of a hand on her knee.

Latchmere was very beautiful and the Mardinors' little house beckoned to them like a friendly hand all the way up from the station. Reuben was proud of that and said: "We're a landmark for miles around. . . . You see that little belt of trees at the back? That's our wood . . . leads straight out of our garden. We must explore. It's a jolly little house . . . a real find. I hope you'll come frequently and stay in it. You neglected me shamefully in North London."

"You?"

"Us, then."

"And how long are you staying down?"

"Till Saturday. I've a man to see at dinner that night, so I'll drive you back."

"Is all that genuine holiday?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, no . . . I'm feeling a bit run

down and a week of Latchmere—and you—seemed a first-rate tonic. I feel better already.”

“The air is certainly delightful.”

He smiled down at her appreciatively, gave her knee another little squeeze and said: “Not only the air, my dear!”

That was the sort of trying thing he was continually doing and saying. And at such times he bored her.

“What’s the programme for the week, Greta?” he asked his wife that evening at dinner.

Whatever it was, Greta was out of it, for the baby had selected this week to be troublesome. At first Mona thought it was decent of Reuben to take this messing-up of his holiday week so good-temperedly, and then she began to perceive that he really did not mind, that he was glad of the excuse to have their visitor to himself. He had always treated Greta like a baby: but that was not how he treated Mona, though she was a full year younger than Greta. He spoke to her as though there was some deep understanding between them: his eyes sent her messages across the flowers at dinner, across the room where they sat at coffee: and he came and sat at her side when she sat at Greta’s Bechstein, though there were no pages to turn as she played always from memory. These things were tiresome enough, but there was more, for when he got her alone, he showed a tendency to discuss Greta and her “condition,” which Mona thought a disgusting thing to do. Besides, she could not bear the casual way in which he set about spoiling for her this business of motherhood. She resented his acceptance of it as a purely physical function, remembering a familiar dictum of Aunt Maud’s that women were not cows. They were not—even rather stupid women like Greta.

“I told her she would not like it,” he said, “but she would have it. It’s she who wanted the kid, not I.”

That little bit of her which did not want things “spoiled” shrank back dismayed. (“Why does he think he can say these things to me? or does he say them to everybody?”)

He had followed her out into the little wilderness which led up to the wood at the back of the garden, where she sat making

a gay water-colour sketch of the sea of bluebells which had overflowed there right to the edge of the wood. Her shrinking self goaded the calm outward self into speech.

"Please don't talk to me like this," she said, "I don't like it. And it isn't kind to Greta."

"Oh, Greta knows my views."

"But if you don't want children, you shouldn't get married. It isn't playing the game."

He laughed as though that was an idea which delighted him.

"What do *you* know about it?" he inquired.

"That is one of the things you don't have to 'know about,'" she said, hating him because he looked at her as though she were something to eat. (Oh, no, Reuben Mardinor, I do not come into the little wood with you . . . ever . . . ever.)

"Is it?" he asked. "What an extraordinary young person you are. . . ." He came nearer, on a pretence of looking at her sketch. "And clever, too. That sketch is very pretty!" (Pretty! she thought, and despised herself for minding that his praise was so banal. What did he know of art? And what did he care?) "Very pretty! Very pretty!" he said again, but it was her neck he was looking at now, just where the gentle slope of her young bosom rose up to meet it. She felt his eyes there and blushed. She dabbed in more bluebells rather hurriedly. There was a little silence before Reuben said: "A delicious thing, like you. . . . D'you know, I'm sorry for that poor devil Harrison."

She clutched at Paul Harrison as though he were a raft and she struggling in seas too deep. And unexpectedly the raft parted asunder.

"Well, you couldn't expect me to marry a man who pushed his plate away when he'd finished with it, could you?" she said, though that was not in the least what she had meant to say. But some devil urged her onwards. "I began to see him pushing *me* away when he'd finished with me. And fancy living with a man who talks about his sitters' souls as though they're winkles he's expected to pick out with a pin!"

Mardinor put back his head and roared with laughter as though she had said something tremendously amusing. "You're

a delightful kid," he said, "I say, when may I show you my wood?"

"*Your* wood?"

"And yours. *Our* wood. . . ."

Instantly she was once again a mass of protective instincts. "Never . . . never." And yet, why *wouldn't* she go? Couldn't she really keep this man in his place? "Why do I shun that wood?" she thought. "It isn't as though I've ever gone into a wood . . . in the way he means." She didn't know that she was shunning Mardinor's implication that she had. She said: "I will show it to myself, thank you, to-morrow morning," and sounded pert because she was puzzled at herself and a little scared.

"Why mustn't I come?" His eyes continued to embarrass her and he could not see that with that frank, slightly mocking air she masked a shy and fugitive spirit.

She began to gather up her sketching materials.

"I'm going in. Greta will be lonely."

Reuben pulled himself up heavily from the ground.

"You might just look at the wood," he said.

"That wood seems to be on your mind," she said.

"It is, rather. . . . What do you propose to do about it?"

"Nothing," she said. "I'm not interested in woods."

"They have their uses!"

"Like taxicabs!" she said.

It was as though she stood on one side and heard some other self saying it, and she thought: "Why do I do it? It's so cheap and silly. And I'm not *like* that, really."

Reuben grinned and her shame was complete.

The following day she devoted herself to Greta and resisted Reuben's blandishments to lure her out into the blue and gold weather. For the next day they had planned an excursion to some near woods, but it dawned cloudily and Greta, who disliked rain and was nervous about getting her feet wet, cried off at the last moment. Since Mona refused to go without her, Reuben tramped off not too amiably alone and Mona spent the day helping Greta to embroider a baby's robe. Greta was an

excellent needlewoman and had made exquisite things for her child to wear. Turning them over, Mona thought: "She thinks of it as a Christmas doll—something to dress," and was a little disturbed when Greta said:

"It's such a pity you can't have a baby without feeling like this and looking such a sight."

"You don't look a sight," said Mona with emphasis.

"Oh, of course I do. Don't think I don't know it. Reuben said last night that I was getting like a tub."

Distaste fluttered for an instant over Mona's face, making her look extraordinarily like her mother.

"Why do you *let* him say things like that?"

"How can I stop him?"

"But it isn't decent. Husbands *oughtn't*."

"Husbands *do*, apparently," said Greta. "Anyway, it's no use pretending I don't look a sight. I do."

"There's a picture by Botticelli upstairs in your bedroom . . ." began Mona.

"Oh, 'Spring!'"

"Well, if you think the lady in the foreground of that is ugly you'll think *you* are!"

"Reuben thinks the lady in the foreground very terrible."

"He probably admires the French corseted figure. As though *that's* 'beautiful.'"

"But one *must* wear corsets."

"I don't."

"Well, you don't look like the ladies Mr. Botticelli draws. (Old Bottled Cherry, Reu calls him.) I don't know how you manage it." Greta laughed. "It was one of our wedding presents . . . in damn bad taste, so Reu says, like giving us a cradle! But he's awful, Mona, in that way. I used to be awfully shocked, at first . . . and he laughed because I didn't understand his jokes. We brought 'Spring' down here because Reu thought it ought to be in the country. But I wish we hadn't. . . . We're so hard up for pictures, here, or I'd put it in the loft. . . . Of course, I'd love that thing you did yesterday of that patch of bluebells, but I don't suppose you can spare that."

"Oh yes, you can have it if you like. But it isn't worth a frame. I haven't done anything yet that is."

"Reu thought the bluebells awfully good. He thinks you're very clever. He admires you tremendously, you know."

So was Mona betrayed into uneasy confidences. . . .

When Reuben next day suggested a walk she refused.

"I want to get a sketch of your cabbage patch," she said. There was a large field of them at the back of the house that made Mona, so she said, feel hungry. "But why this morning?" "Because it happens to be sunny and Greta can sit beside me in the garden while I do it."

"What happens to me?"

"But I didn't come to see you, you know," Mona said.

Reuben shrugged his shoulders and went out.

"Do go with him, Mona," pleaded Greta. "If you don't, he'll only put it on to me . . . I mean, he'll say I'm jealous and won't let you."

"How ridiculous!"

"I know, but do go!"

"Greta, you're a little fool!"

"I know, but I do hate rows." (Rows!) "Please do go, Mona. You can do the cabbages this afternoon, or to-morrow."

"But I want to try that sketch of *you* then."

"But to-day's only Thursday, and you're not going until Saturday evening. Or do sketches take longer than that?"

"Supposing you aren't feeling well enough to-morrow? You know you look such a lot better to-day. Couldn't you bear to sit this morning?"

"Oh, I daresay I'll be all right again now for a bit. Mona, please let me go and tell Reu you've changed your mind."

"But I didn't come down here to keep Reuben company. I think you spoil him."

"Let me . . ."

"Oh, all *right*. . . ."

They set out. It was a glorious morning and the country looked alluringly young and fresh. They kept to the high-road and made for a place called Merton's Ford, some six miles

away, from which, so Reuben said, he knew a footpath home, by way of Lychett Cross and Meon.

"It's one of our beauty spots," he told her, "you really can't afford to miss it."

But it soon transpired that it was neither the beauty of Merton's Ford nor his anxiety that she should not miss it, which had brought Reuben in this direction. The real reason was apparent when they struck the footpath past the little clearing, which ran up out of Lychett and obviously straight through the beech wood on the hill.

The beech wood, when they came to it, was dark and deep and silent, and to Mona, the clicking of the little wicket gate which Mardinor shut behind them was like the turning of the key in a prison door. In that dim place of trees she looked very white, very young and slim; and fear hid in her heart. Beneath that queer mocking air she wore, that assumption of bravado with which she swung along ever so slightly ahead of him, the fear grew and grew. She thought: "If he touches me I shall scream."

But she didn't scream. He left her no breath for screaming. Besides, she hadn't known it would be as bad as all that. A thing as bad as all that left you dumb and suffering. Mona was abashed and ashamed. "What is there about me that makes men behave like this—what makes them think I like it?" And because she was very near tears she whipped herself to a greater show of anger and disgust than that terrible thought about herself would really allow her to feel.

"You beast!" she said. "How dared you do that?"

"You needn't pretend you didn't like it . . . that you wouldn't like me to do it again!" He actually smiled. Oh the fool, the besotted, ignorant fool! The desire for tears grew upon her insanely. She clenched her hands and was silent, biting back her tears. But she knew from the way he put his arm through hers that he was taking her silence for agreement. She snatched away her arm and stood at bay.

"You're mistaken. Indeed you are!" she got out. "You've made a dreadful mistake. I . . . *hate* you . . . *hate* you. . . . How dared you think I *wanted* you to do that?"

"Then why did you make yourself so nice to me?"

"Nice?" Oh, surely this was a nightmare. She would wake up in a minute. "Nice? I was no more than commonly civil. . . . Do you behave like this to every girl who isn't a boor?"

"*Commonly civil!*" Mardinor's impudent eyes appraised her coldly. "Well, I'd like to be the chap to whom you're *uncommonly* civil, that's all."

She remembered that silly idle conversation. "They have their uses—like taxicabs!" His fault . . . he had played deliberately upon her obvious weakness. He knew well enough that she wasn't in the least that sort of girl; that she merely wanted to be thought very modern, grown-up and smart. He *did* know: he chose not to know. She felt as though a motor-bus had splashed her from head to foot.

Nearly four miles back to Latchmere. All the rest of this dim wood, and what beyond? She turned and ran and ran. . . . When she heard his step behind her she trembled. When he drew near and scanned her profile, she caught her breath, because it seemed his eyes must read her loathing not of him alone but of herself. For a long time they walked abreast, in a silence that became a tangible living thing. She wondered if he knew her legs trembled beneath her; she felt their uncertainty must reveal itself as she walked, and if he perceived it, he would think she was afraid. So she was. But not of him—not out here on the highroad, where the sun fell bright like a sword—but of herself . . . of all the other men there were in the world. And all the time that sick thought walking to and fro in her mind: "What is there *in* me? What can there *possibly* be in me?" Her shame was at full tide. The waves broke over her.

Then Reuben spoke: "You women!" he said. "You make me sick! You're all alike, every one of you, with your silly faces and your naked flesh. Why don't you cover yourselves up?" Her hands went instinctively to that line of slender throat, to the rounded neck of her loose short frock. "You don't mind rousing passions, but that's the end of it, for you."

"How dare you!" she said.

Reuben laughed. "Oh, you *haven't* led me on, I suppose? You *haven't* given me the glad eye ever since I first met you!"

Rage took her by the throat.

"You shan't," she said, "you shan't say things like that. You know they're not true, that the things I said didn't matter. They were just silliness and cheapness . . . and vanity. Oh, I hate you, hate you, hate you. . . ."

"Shut up!" said Reuben. Not for nothing had he known women. That sharp command crushed the rising hysteria that in another moment would have choked her. "And put that handkerchief away. The badge of all your silly tribe." She had been walking along stuffing it in her mouth, like a child who wants to cry and is too proud. She put it away as he spoke and made a frantic grab after self-control. "That's better," Reuben said. "Now listen to me."

She listened to him. The process made her feel very sick. She thought: "It *must* be a nightmare; in a minute I shall wake up," and then: "It isn't fair, it isn't fair. Why should this sort of thing happen to me?"

Back at the little beckoning house she fled upstairs, locked the door, and stood there just inside, stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth to keep back the sound of her sobs. Even now she wasn't crying. If she cried Greta would see and ask what the matter was. Greta, of course, mustn't know. . . . Does this sort of thing happen to all girls? Not at eighteen. This oughtn't to happen to you at eighteen. It leaves a mark.

Presently she went to the dressing-table; powdered her face, ran a comb through her hair, and tried to lay hands on her straying self-possession.

"I can't possibly stop here till Saturday . . . I must go out after lunch and 'phone father to send me a wire. . . ."

The sound of the gong came creeping softly up the staircase. Lunch!

"Oh, I can't . . . I simply can't."

How could she possibly sit opposite him and eat? "I shall never want anything to eat again."

The sound of the gong went on—like some stealthy animal

creeping up the staircase. She went to the window and looked down on the wilderness waving there beneath it; a sea of green and blue, and beyond it that patch of bright green that was the cabbage patch. The cabbages looked cheerful and seemed to wink and smile at her. She smiled back forlornly, as though for one blissful moment she forgot she was only eighteen and scarred for life. "I would have loved to have taken you home in paint! Good-bye . . . good-bye. I shall never come again you know, never." Her heart ached, for it was very beautiful down there in the wilderness.

She went to the door and opened it. She no longer wanted to cry. She would face that horrible business of lunch (he would see she had not cried, anyway!) sustained by the thought of the sound of her father's voice across the distance. . . .

He had not written for two days. Perhaps there was a letter from him downstairs . . . that she hadn't noticed when she ran through the hall ten minutes ago. She summoned her dignity, and as though it were a lady-in-waiting, it walked superbly with her down Greta's wide green-carpeted stairs.

No letter. . . .

She opened the door of the dining-room and went in. And the first thing she saw was the buff envelope on the mantelshelf addressed to herself. Rather anxiously, Greta handed it to her. "I hope it's not important. It came half an hour after you'd gone out. There was simply no one to send . . . even if I had known where you'd gone."

The telegram was from Judy, and it said:

"Come home at once father ill."

Greta's blue and white crockery danced crazily on her table of black oak. Greta was pushing her into a chair, saying: "There's no train until six . . . our service is awful. . . . Sit down and have something to eat, and Reu will run you up in his car. You can do it in a couple of hours."

"Oh no, not that, please. . . . If someone might ring up the garage."

Reuben went out. His voice floated in to them, a mist of words, indistinguishable. He came back.

"I'm afraid I'll have to force my company upon you. The garage has nothing."

She wanted to say: "I don't believe you . . ." but instead she said: "I shall be very grateful."

After that the horrible business of lunch, to Greta's running fire of deliberately cheerful conversation. (There was nothing to stop either. They would go on for ever.) A glimpse of her white face in the glass as she crammed on her hat: the sight of her belongings neatly set together in the hall: a glimpse of the water-colour of the bluebells lying there on the table. (She had told Greta to rescue it.) And Greta's voice was saying: "Oh, I *wish* you weren't going. . . . I hope you'll find your father better. . . . Has it been *very* dull, Mona?"

"Dull?"

Mona smiled crookedly, not meeting Greta's eyes.

"No, not dull, anyway."

Sounds of Reuben bringing round the car and Greta's voice suddenly low and confidential.

"Mona! Has Reuben been . . . tiresome? No, please tell me."

"It doesn't matter." It didn't, any longer.

"Oh, Mona, it's awful. . . . He does it with everybody, more or less. . . . Nobody ever comes to stay with me twice."

Not even the consolation of knowing that one had been something rather unusual . . . that one had inspired some sort of profound, if embarrassing, emotion, just by being oneself. Reuben's emotions were neither unusual nor profound. Neither was he. There was no discrimination. "Everybody . . . more or less." Greta had known and had let her in for it. Nothing fine about Greta . . . Mona hated her.

"When did he begin this?"

"He's never stopped, only it's worse since the baby's been coming. I am no longer attractive, to him, you see. Oh, Mona, I'm so horribly, horribly lonely."

No, you couldn't hate her. There wasn't enough of her.

"Don't . . . I'll come again . . . when Reuben isn't here. And later on you must come to us . . ."

"Oh, yes, yes."

For a moment they clung to each other, then Reuben was bringing the car to a standstill at the open door. Mona went to her place beside Reuben and smiled back at Greta, framed like a picture in the black oak of the doorway.

It seemed to Mona that Reuben sat unnecessarily close to her, but she did not care. She did not even care that every now and then he put a hand upon her knee. She hated him, but she endured it because he was taking her home. She would be home before the six o'clock train left Latchmere. Surely she owed him something for that. She sat at his side oblivious to everything but the long unending road ahead, and dumb with her gratitude. She stopped the car at the corner of the street and stood on the pavement a second—a wistful figure in her thin summer clothes—to thank him. Then turning she began to run fleetly up the gently sloping street. Another moment and drawing level with the house she saw that the blinds were down. She knocked at the door and sank weakly on the old oak settle within the porch where all those years ago old John Norman had sat down to die.

Martha came to the door, her face red and swollen with crying. Mona crept inside and stood on the mat, weakly, as she had sat on the old settle within the porch.

"When?" she asked. "Oh, Martha, *when?*"

"Twelve o'clock this morning."

Mona's heart turned over within her. Twelve o'clock! He had died just when that awful thing was happening to her in the woods at Lychett Cross.

She stood limply against the wall and wept and wept. . . .

A door opened and Judy came out and stood there, looking at her. Through her tears Mona saw her face—white, set, tearless. The sight of her sister's self-possession seemed to Mona to cut her off, so that her isolation was complete, absolute. The world held nothing but Judy's hostile eyes, her appalling calm. Here she was at the end of all things and with no rag of bravery left with which to greet it. She was half dead with shock and fright and the grief which muted her voice when she said: "But, Judy, he *oughtn't* to have died. He only had a cold."

"He went out when he shouldn't. . . ."

Judy's voice was hard.

"To Fiveways?"

"No, later. He didn't begin to get bad until Wednesday, and then, just as mother had persuaded him to go to bed, he had a wire . . ."

"From whom?"

"I don't know. . . . Someone he said he had to see. Mother tried to prevent him, but she couldn't. . . . She cried. I didn't think mother could. He was ever so ill when he got back."

"Where have they put him, Judy?"

"Your room. . . . It was quietest and he wanted it. But you mustn't go up."

"I must."

"Mona, you can't. Mother particularly said not . . . yet. He died of hæmorrhage. He had double pneumonia, you know. . . . The pain's still in his face."

Mona stood there, looking at her sister as though she didn't see her at all, nor hear what she said.

"Oh, Judy, I can't stand it . . . I can't stand it . . ." she said, and her voice was a chant of unutterable woe.

"*I'm standing it*," said Judy, "and mother. We loved father, too, you know. Mother's lying down: if we stand out here talking we shall disturb her."

"Have you seen father?"

"I went in before they told me. I wish I hadn't. . . . Mona, don't, you'll always be sorry."

"I shan't . . . ever," said Mona, and went on up the stairs.

She pushed open the door of the room that had been hers since she could remember. It was dark within, for they had drawn the blind against the smiling blue day. She advanced quietly to the side of the bed and turned back the sheet. She had never seen a dead body before and again her heart turned over within her.

"Father, oh, father!"

Judy said he had died dreadfully, choked with blood—and that was why there was still the finger of pain upon his dead

face. But Judy was wrong. That look of pain was not for himself, but for her. He knew that something, down there in Latchmere, was happening to her—something he couldn't prevent. . . . He had loved her so much that he had known. He had wanted her. . . . Surely he had thought of her, lying there in her bed, looking upon her scattered, untidy belongings. And surely, now that she had come, those lines of pain were already smoothing themselves out?

She turned away and drew the blind up, very gently, half-way.

"He'd hate it all dark like this. . . . He'd want to see the last of—all that . . ." The June day, she meant, and the garden down there which they'd tended and laughed at together; their silly, sweet little garden, where a few nights ago they had looked at the apple-tree in the moonlight . . ."

"It isn't true," she said. "It isn't the same for them. They didn't love you as I loved you . . . they didn't *need* you as I did . . . as I do."

And on that thought her self-possession snapped like a thread. She threw herself by the bed and stretched out her arms across the quiet sleeper.

"Father! Father . . . come back to me. . . . Come back to me! Father! Father!"

CHAPTER TWO

BETH BLUNSDON, coming up for the funeral, uncovered, in the house of the wounded, a wound of her own. Her eldest boy, Harry, was going out to Canada to join a friend. . . .

Only Mona perceived that this piece of news had revived in Mark those old boyish dreams of farming which nobody had taken seriously save Jeremy Bentley.

"I believe you'd like to go," she said to her brother, who neither affirmed nor denied. "Well, I can't," he said shortly. "I can't leave mother now father's gone."

"Why not? Mother doesn't want looking after. She doesn't, Mark. Not even now."

The sight of her brother pathetically following her mother about in a futile effort to relieve her of unfelt burdens, was the one thing, throughout a procession of weary days, that could bring a smile to Mona's wan face. There was nothing you could do for mother. She wasn't even in need of money. Father had seen to that. And Mark thought he could not go to Canada because of her. . . .

He felt like that, Mona was sure, because her mother had taken him into her confidence. He knew all there was to know concerning that incident connected with her father's death. But he would not tell Mona. "If mother wants you to know," he said, "she'll tell you."

Mona, her nerves on edge, thought he sounded priggish. "I suppose you're against father, too," she said. "It used to be mother you criticised."

"No one's against father," said Mark coldly. "Don't talk rot!"

"But you think he oughtn't to have gone that night. You're critical of him over that, like mother. It's beastly of you, Mark, now that he isn't here to defend himself!"

"I tell you, you're talking rot. You don't judge the dead."

"Mother does. She judges the living and the dead," Mona said bitterly, and went out of the room.

And then her mother told her what she had told Mark.

When she had finished Mona sat there curled up on the Chesterfield, watching her mother sort out her neglected correspondence and wondering a little how she could bear to do it. Outside it was raining. There was a hard set look about Eve's face that something keenly perceptive in Mona felt had nothing at all to do with grief. And as Eve looked across at her young daughter, so pale and woebegone in her black clothes, the hard look deepened, tugging a little savagely at the corners of her still beautiful mouth.

Mona said quietly: "Then I suppose she'd gone on caring for father all the time . . . I mean, if she wanted him, like that, at the end."

Something in Eve revolted horribly from the pretty story Mona was making of it.

"Yes," she said, "only it wasn't the end, you see. She didn't die."

"Is she going to get better?"

"No. But the deathbed scene was premature, to say the least."

"All the same, mother, I think it was *fine* of father to go."

"Fine?" Eve's voice shook. "He killed himself for her, if you call that fine."

"I do—in a sort of way. But father couldn't have known it was going to kill him, and he did believe she was dying. Besides, father would never admit he was ill."

"He admitted it this time. He dragged himself out of his bed when the telegram came and ordered Martha to get a taxi."

"I expect he sat with both windows down and his clothes on anyhow. It was the sort of thing he'd do."

"If he'd stayed quietly at home he would be alive now."

That woman was of more importance than his wife and children."

Mona said nothing. The tears in her throat choked back the defence of her father. But a warm and vehement pity sprang up in her heart for her mother, because she did not know that her father had gone to that woman not because he cared, but because he had long ago ceased to care; and because she was ill and asked for him. Not to know that of her father was to know nothing whatever about him. What he had said down there by the apple-tree floated back now to the girl who remembered him so vividly. "We owe a lot to these men—and women—we thought we loved."

"Mother wouldn't understand that," she thought. "She'd never *think* she loved anyone." Mona was crushed by a sense of her mother's strength: and torn by the thought that already, at eighteen, there were things she could never reveal to her. "Mother is wonderful, but she doesn't inspire confidence. . . . If I told her about Reuben she'd say he was beastly; if I told her about my part in it she'd think there was something dreadful about *me*. . . . She'd be shocked and hurt." She was oppressed by the sense that she had it in her to shock and hurt her mother. "Why am I so certain I shall end by doing things she'll hate and can't understand?"

Save for the patter of the rain on the window, the silence endured. Mona sat there huddled up on the Chesterfield, hugging her knees. Nothing—no thought, no recollection, no anticipation—came to rescue her from the sudden hopelessness and emptiness of life. She did not see how she was going to bear it.

Eve knew that she wept.

And after all the death-bed scene was not so hopelessly premature as Eve imagined. Only a week later the papers were announcing the death of Linda, Lady Wroxeter, at a Nursing Home in Wimpole Street, following an operation for cancer. . . .

In the days that immediately followed Eve's brusque matter-of-fact public manner must have hidden much and deceived

many, as she moved about again, gathering up the loose ends of her manifold interests. But it neither deceived nor hid anything from Mona, whose heart, every time she looked at her, was caught and held in a gin of pity. "She can't bear you to see," she thought. "If she were dying in agony she'd pull the sheet up over her face and die decently. That's mother."

Some little bit of Eve had certainly died, and no one had witnessed its death agonies. The Eve that was left—that self-controlled figure standing up so quietly in public before "this thing woe"—had less interest than ever in the queer alien world in which Mona was immersed, and had not yet ceased to resent the romantic garb in which she had dressed the incident which, as Eve firmly believed, had caused her father's death. And to her father's death, too, she attributed Mona's sudden settling down to work, the dropping of the more violent of her adjectives and her neglect of the studio in Matson Road, Chelsea, where Garth Manistre complained that she didn't come and didn't answer his letters, in the tone of one who was used to having his letters answered and his invitations accepted.

"What's wrong!" Shane wanted to know, "why have you chucked us?"

Shane still came but seldom to Marne House, and when he came he mitigated Mona's sense of loneliness in no wise. For Shane had cared for Frank Norman, too, and no more than Mona could bear to talk of him and his death. Their common misery drove them apart, deepened Mona's sense that the old intimacy between them had gone for ever. As she looked up now from her black and white design it seemed to her that Shane deliberately avoided her gaze.

"I'll let you into a secret," she said, "I've given up trying to impress men; stopped caring, much, whether they think I'm clever or not. So there isn't really much point in my going to the studio any longer. I've grown out of all that and not grown into anything else as yet. That's about all there is to it, I think." She laughed. "I expect I shall end by being most fearfully dull."

Shane said nothing for a moment, just stood there

watching her fill in her design. "No, you'll never be dull," he said at length. "That's rather a nice design." But he wasn't looking at the design. He was looking at the white nape of her neck, flying no signal of his presence there at her back. She was profoundly unaware of him, and as she went quietly on with her drawing and only spoke when spoken to, Shane collected his belongings and prepared to depart. And then Mona looked up. "Going?" she said, "so soon?"

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much point in my staying, does there?" Shane asked.

"There doesn't seem much point in anything, these days," Mona said. Then she put her pen down with determination and twisted round in her seat. "Shane, what is it about you?"

"About me?"

"Oh, don't pretend there isn't anything. You know there is. You must know you're different. Have been, ever since you came back from Leipsic."

Shane said: "You're different, too, if it comes to that."

"Well, things have happened to me. And I do admit it." She frowned. "You don't. You go on pretending things were always like this between us. You know they weren't."

"Do I? Well, things have happened to me too."

"Horrid things?"

"It's always horrid finding yourself out, isn't it?" Shane said.

The colour came into Mona's face. "Perfectly beastly," she said. Then suddenly her tone became utterly impersonal. "What about the book? When does it appear?"

"Autumn, some time."

"I'm anxious to see it."

"You'll hate it. So will your mother."

"But mother and I never dislike the same book," Mona objected.

"You will this time." Shane hesitated; then he, too, strove for the utterly impersonal note—and missed it. "Mona, if I asked you *not* to read *Mirage*. . ."

Mona said: "Don't be silly. Of *course* I'm going to read it. Why, I've never had my reading censored in all my life."

In the days that followed it really did look as though Mona had meant what she said when she had declared that she had "grown-out of the studio." It was not so much that she avoided it as did not think of it. . . . Then Grace Manistre, Garth's mother, came unexpectedly to town, deposited herself one afternoon at the studio, demanded tea and desired to be informed of the identity of the girl of whom so many sketches adorned the walls. Grace Manistre was a decorative person in a way that reminded you of Liberty's rather than of Heal's. Her movements were harmonious and deliberate, because she believed there was truth in the bad pun Garth made of her years ago when he said that she never hurried because she would not sacrifice grace upon the altar of celerity. In the same leisurely fashion, after six years of marriage, she had produced one son instead of the half-dozen expected of her. For the rest, she was good-natured, talkative and rather stupid, and at the moment more interested in the identity of the original of those numerous sketches than in anything else.

Garth grudgingly vouchsafed information. "She's a girl called Norman—Monica Norman. She doesn't come to see us nowadays and you don't know her."

"Norman, Norman," murmured Grace Manistre, endeavouring to look intelligent about it. "I seem to know the name, dear boy."

"But it's quite an ordinary name. This Miss Norman's father was a dentist, though she has, I believe, a lot of swish relations. Ask Shane. He knows all about them—lived with them since he was a kid."

"A dentist!" said Grace Manistre in much the same tones as Blanche Forrest had said it all those years ago to Frank.

"He was lots of other things as well," Garth said, "but not up your street, mother. You'd have wanted to send him to the pater's tailor and have given him hints about his socks. His clothes, so Shane says, were the only quarrelsome thing about him. Shane, come over here and relate the History of the Normans in Fifty Chapters, whilst I hunt for the grub. . . ." Maternal anxiety struggled ineffably with maternal adoration

in Grace Manistre's bosom as she watched the preparations for tea and listened to Shane's attempts to be informative.

"I'm sorry there's no cake," Garth interrupted presently, "but if you won't learn the uses of the public telephone, this sort of thing must be constantly happening to you."

"I don't want any cake," said Grace Manistre. "You can take me out somewhere to dinner presently. But I do want to meet this Miss Norman. Can't you ask her here to tea while I'm up? How old is she? Older or younger than you?"

"Both," said Garth.

"My dear boy! I really think you'd better ask her to tea."

So Garth came along to Marne House with his invitation.

"No use getting you on the 'phone," he said, "you'd have put me off, as you did Shane, even if that old curmudgeon of a maid of yours didn't swear you were out, as she usually does."

Mona made silent acknowledgment of this fact of Garth's attempts at telephonic communication, and coupled with it a resolution to give Martha a talking-to. "It's absurd the way she censors our existence," she thought, and was a long while answering Garth's question.

"Well?" he said at length, "what about it?"

Mona was still working at her black and white design, and she looked up from it now in fashion not deliberately coquettish or enticing, but which managed, none the less, to be both very successfully. Garth knew the look well enough; what he did not know was that it came to Mona as naturally as song to a bird.

"If I come, do you think your mother will like me?"

"Couldn't help it. Do you want her to like you?"

"I want everybody to like me. I love being liked. I wish I didn't. Being liked is necessary to my very existence."

"You can't be in any immediate danger of dissolution," said Garth.

He didn't know what he had expected her to say to that, but he certainly expected her to say something. And she didn't. She looked at him for a moment, then put her hands in front of her face and burst into tears. "I'm so horribly

lonely," she sobbed when he put an arm around her. "There just isn't anything, *anywhere*."

Garth Manistre had never felt like that even for one moment in his twenty-four years of life, but that Mona should be feeling like it just then was so providential that he did not find it even embarrassing. Garth was one of those people whose footsteps are obstinately dogged by Good Fortune. His life ran smoothly in pleasant places. Horrid things never happened to him; nuisances and vexations ran, shrieking, from his presence. Perhaps Mona sensed these things. Perhaps not. Certainly she wept unrestrainedly upon his shoulder and when she had recovered permitted herself to be coaxed to look at life from a new angle. It would never have occurred to Shane to tackle such a situation in such a fashion. "When we look at life Shane and I see the same things," Mona thought later, "and sometimes it's only a brick wall we see."

There were no brick walls spoiling Garth Manistre's view of things.

Mona's friendship with this enchanted, unobstructed being really began from that afternoon in June when she looked up from the damp mess she had made of his coat and apologised for having made a fool of herself.

"You couldn't," Garth told her. "Only ordinary mortals can do that. You're not ordinary—you're . . . you're unique. . . ."

She was grateful for the adjective. Comforting to be called unique when all the available evidence is to the contrary.

"Shane would never have called me 'unique,'" she thought, "probably because he knows I'm not. . . ."

During that short stay in town Grace Manistre took a distinct liking to Mona and contrived to see a good deal of her. Moreover, she stage-managed affairs to such good purpose that Mona's friendship with her son moved several paces forward. Over dinners and theatres Garth and she drifted into an intimacy so extraordinarily dissimilar from the casual wordy affair of an immediate past that when Grace Manistre went back to Westmorland she took back with her the comforting

knowledge that she left behind her two young people intensely conscious of themselves and of their effect upon one another. During the rest of June, whilst Shane worked at the proofs of his novel and turned out his inconsequent essays for the high-brow weekly that seemed to like them, Mona and Garth went on seeing a good deal of each other, enough, certainly, to make Mona sensible of a distinct gap in things when he, too, went off to Westmorland, so that it was almost with a sense of relief that she learned of Greta's return from Latchmere.

"I've promised Mrs. Anderson that you shall run in one day and see her," said Eve, and having said, "Why, yes, of course," Mona paused to make her voice carefully expressionless. "Is Reuben to be there, too?"

Reuben, Eve understood, was still at Latchmere.

"You don't mean that Greta has left him?"

"She *says* she has left him."

"But I thought Greta was going to have a baby?"

"How does that affect things?"

"Of course, it affects them *dreadfully*."

"You use absurd words."

"But I mean 'dreadfully,' mother. If you really wanted to leave your husband and were going to have a baby, it *would* be dreadful—specially if you found you really couldn't go."

"My dear child, there are certain things in life a woman has definitely to make up her mind about—certain things no woman can possibly endure."

"Certain things that certain women cannot possibly endure. Darling, you do generalise, don't you?" Mona frowned. "Children ought to have two parents. . . . Greta ought to have hung on a bit, even if Reuben didn't want the baby."

"Did Greta tell you that he didn't?"

"No, Reuben told me."

"Surely that isn't true, Mona?"

"I'm afraid it is, darling. Men *do* talk to me like that. I never know why."

"I can't believe that any nice man can talk of such matters to any nice girl."

"But Reuben *isn't* nice in the way you mean, and he seemed

to have an idea that I wasn't, either. It was a little trying. But p'raps he was right. P'raps I'm *not* 'nice,' in your way.'

"And this is the man you've always maintained you liked !

"So I did—so I do, one bit of him. I used to find him fascinating !"

"*Fascinating !*" Eve's scorn was withering. "From all I hear you are not the only girl who has used that silly word about Greta's husband. And in most cases he seems to have returned the compliment. It's a very poor one, surely. A girl of your upbringing ought not to pay the Reuben Mardinors of the world the honour of showing the faintest interest in them."

"Unfortunately, I get interested in people before they show me their character chart, you know, mother. . . . What's going to happen to Greta ?"

"She'll get a divorce, I suppose."

"She can't—on the strength of the other ladies who have found her husband 'fascinating.' She's got to prove cruelty or desertion. And I don't see how she can do either. Reuben wouldn't hurt a fly, and it's Greta who seems to have done the deserting. I apologise for knowing all this, but you really can't help it, darling, with a mother on the Divorce Reform Committee."

She went to tea with Greta the next day and listened to all that she had to say, but afterwards the only thing that remained in her mind was something Greta had said right at the end. "You're very old-fashioned, you know, Mona."

"Old-fashioned ?" she had queried. "*Me ?*" Then she had laughed. "Do you know," she said, "that's never occurred to me before. I wonder if I really am ?"

"You pretend to be," said her mother when the question was put to her. "You pretend to be so many things. It's just a silly habit you've got into of posing, as much to yourself as to everybody else. I hope you'll soon grow out of it."

"It must be lovely always to know, *for certain*," Mona murmured.

Eve looked at her.

"My dear child, that kind of cheap rudeness has no sort of effect upon me whatsoever," she said.

"I didn't mean to be rude, darling."

"All the same, you were. . . . If you're not coming in to lunch to-day, please tell Martha so. Remember that she's getting too old to do anything the least bit unnecessary."

"I thought the new girl was to do the unnecessary things? Or isn't there a 'new girl' at the moment?"

"There will be to-morrow, I understand," said Eve.

"It isn't much use trying to find people to help Martha." Eve sighed. "Yes, that's Martha's view, too," she said.

Early in July Shane corrected the last of his proofs and went off mountaineering in Switzerland. Eve was preparing to go off to the leas at Folkestone, and Mona's wish to escape them was furthered by an invitation from Grace Manistre to Ghyll House, to which Garth had added a fervent postscript: "Do come: we offer as an inducement not ourselves, but our setting. You'll get some first-class sketching." So Judy and Eve departed to the leas by themselves, and a strangely excited Mona went up to Windermere, where she was met by an equally excited young man in a two-seater, who pointed out the landmarks to her and mapped out a hectic programme of climbing and exploration as they drove into Grasmere.

Then they swung round a corner and came upon the Lake lying like a blue stone, in the hollow of the fells.

"Why has all this been kept from me?" Mona demanded. "Why have I been fobbed off with the Folkestone leas, Brighton pier and the Surrey hills?"

"Haven't you ever been to Devon or Cornwall, or upon the Yorkshire coast?"

"No, Folkestone, I tell you, and Brighton and the Surrey hills and a place in Shropshire, when I was too little to remember. Oh, and Lincolnshire occasionally. This comes of having a mother who hates the country. Garth, I can't *think* how you can bear to live in Chelsea, when you could live here."

"It may be because you come to Chelsea."

"I could come here—if I were asked. You've never thought of asking me before."

"You wouldn't have come if I had."

"I might have done if I could have squared mother."

"You'd never have squared her."

"So you squared yours?"

"Not at all. Mother was most keen on having you here."

"And not you?"

"Can't you see how bored I am with the prospect of having fourteen days with you?"

Mona was silent as she certainly would not have been silent three months ago. They raced through Grasmere village, past the church, past Butharlyp How, up a steep track to a low white house hidden among the trees. Down the valley opposite flowed a white stream of water.

"Sour Milk ghyll," Garth introduced it. "I hope it won't keep you awake at night. It comes from the tarn at the top of the valley. We'll go and look at it after dinner, unless you're too tired and would rather go to bed."

"Bed!" she said. "I can't bear to go inside and leave it. Garth, it was perfectly sweet of you to ask me."

"Rot! Perfectly sweet of you to come. I can't tell you how I've missed you. Have you missed me, Mona?"

"Horribly!" she said, but as she went up the steps to the front door, which a servant-maid was holding open, she thought: "Now, do I really mean that, or am I getting him mixed up with the scenery?"

She was never really sure.

So, during that first wonderful week, while Eve and Judy disported themselves at Folkestone, Mona climbed Helvellyn and Skiddaw and Pike o' Stickle, and Mary Bentley died quietly of heart failure.

"We're catching the next train home," wrote Judy, giving her news, "because mother thinks we ought to go to the funeral, but she doesn't see why you should come home, and I certainly shouldn't if I were you. Family deaths are very tiresome and it seems so feeble of Aunt Sachie, after doing nothing much all her life, to go and die of heart failure at fifty-six. However, it was considerate of her to manage it

now, rather than at Christmas, when we should have had to buy new mourning."

"Judy's a beast!" said Mona, and went out and wired to her mother. "Darling, I'll come home at once, if I can be of any help." And was cut to the quick by Eve's reply: "You can't. No sense in spoiling your holiday."

"It's because I telegraphed 'darling,'" she thought. "Why can't I remember that mother hates that sort of thing?"

Garth was very kind to her that afternoon, as though he imagined she had been really fond of the dead aunt, as though in some way, poor Mary Bentley had really counted to anybody in the world. Garth seemed to have a perfect passion for aunts of his own, most of whom he considered "good sports." After lunch, they walked up the valley to Far Easedale and Greenup, and whenever that bitter thought: "Mother doesn't want me" crossed her mind, she remembered that Garth Manistre did, and then inconsequently she thought it a little unreasonable of him. For Garth had so much. He sat so definitely on the sunny side of the hedge, that already she wondered if he were aware that there was any other. Certainly a Garth at war with Fate, defeated, harassed or frustrated, would have touched that something else in Mona which responded to nothing that this spoiled child of Fortune either was or did. What fascinated her at the moment, however, was the thoroughness with which he sat on the sunny side of the hedge and the persistency with which he ignored the side in shadow. Garth had the quality of permanence about his satisfaction in the scheme of things and his place in it, that attracted Mona because she hadn't it, and repelled her because she felt that nobody should have it quite so abundantly.

They had tea out that afternoon of the Far Easedale and Greenup walk, and were late home to dinner. Mona was a little puzzled by Grace Manistre's obvious amusement at their perfectly valid excuses, until Garth and she wandered out together after dinner into the garden.

"Don't you think," he said, holding the match to her cigarette, "that I might have at least one of the kisses mother

believes made us late for dinner? You've been here a week and you've never let me kiss you once."

She smiled, was rather a long time about her cigarette and said nothing—all of which Garth seemed to take for acquiescence. But she was so quiet afterwards, that he said: "Are you sorry? Do you wish you hadn't?"

The night, dark and still and scented, hid her frowning.

"No, I'm only wondering why I liked it so much. I don't, usually."

"Because you like me, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, of course I like you. But then, I liked the others."

"Do you like me enough to marry me?"

"Marry you?"

"To be engaged to me, then. . . ."

"I don't want to be engaged."

"To me?"

"To anybody. . . . I don't like repeating my effects."

"Oh, the egregious Harrison! He doesn't count, and you weren't ever really engaged to him."

"As good as. . . . Besides, it wasn't only Paul Harrison . . . lots of men have kissed me. . . . One of them told me I was 'cheap.' You see, I can't believe in the permanence of my emotions. . . ." She cried out in sudden pain, "One ought to be sure of oneself. I oughtn't to let you kiss me again until I am."

"I'm sure. I'm dead sure. You're in my blood."

"Like a germ?"

"A beneficent germ."

She said, surprisingly: "When I was a little girl, my father wanted to go out to the Boer War. Not because he believed in the British cause, but because we were faring badly. My Aunt Maud told me that, and she said that mother could not understand it: didn't see how that long line of defeat affected him. I can, because I'm like that, too. . . . It's the losing game that interests me."

"And what exactly is the meaning of this earthly story with a heavenly meaning?"

"Only that yours is not the losing game. I couldn't bear to marry anyone so appallingly successful."

"Then I've been imagining things. You don't . . . care . . . for me?"

"Yes, I do. One little bit of me cares for you enormously—the little bit of me that likes the things you have and believe in. But, you see, there's such a lot *more* of me. . . ."

"You'd marry me if I were—a failure? How absurd you are!"

"Because you *can't* fail?" She laughed. "Do let us go in—or talk about something else."

They went in.

CHAPTER THREE

THE third week in August, nineteen-fourteen.

Shane Mostyn put his key in the door and let himself into the little square hall where Mona sat curled up in the window-seat, gazing out into the quiet road, up from the bottom of which drifted the sound of drum and fife and of marching feet.

"Hallo!" she said, and seemed to have forgotten that she had been waiting three whole weeks for him to come, so little enthusiasm was in her tone.

"You don't seem very surprised to see me," Shane said.

"I'm not. I saw you coming up the road. Besides, I knew you must come some day. Where's your luggage?"

"God knows!"

He took a step towards her and she saw that he limped. Relief seized upon her, overflowed into her voice. "Is it the foot that has been keeping you?"

"Rather not. The foot's nothing, though it did rather dish my climbing. The fact is, we'd gone on to Italy and it hasn't been too easy getting back."

"We?"

"There was a girl at Chamonix. . . . She'd done the Swiss mountains before and was going on to Italy, anyway. There didn't seem to be any reason why we shouldn't go together."

Everything seemed to drop away from Mona but her indifference.

"Have a good time?"

"More or less. We spent quite a lot of time discussing the European situation."

"Well, that was lucky, anyway, for there's nobody here to

discuss the European situation with. Everybody here talks war—it's not the same thing."

"Everybody?"

"Mother, Judy, Mark and Garth when they come home (they're both in training for commissions), Aunt Maud and Gran'pa Bentley—when we have time to go and see him."

"And you?"

"I don't talk, if I can help it. My conversation is limited to 'Pass the salt' and 'I shan't be in to lunch.' Do you want any tea?"

She got up from her seat and made to pass him, not understanding why she was suddenly glad of the excuse to get away, nor why a wave of fierce anger rose in her heart when he seized her by the wrists and pulled her near enough for him to put his arm round her and kiss her.

"Don't," she said. "You know we don't do that."

"Not after six weeks' absence?"

"Not after sixty."

She slipped from his grasp and went off to the kitchen. A different Mona came back five minutes later with a tea-tray and an inscrutable expression. "When did you get home?" she asked.

"On the eighteenth."

Mona did a rapid calculation. "A week ago? But you haven't been at the studio."

"I haven't been in town."

She said, "I see," but she didn't see at all. If Shane "came home" and was neither at Marne House nor at the studio, where could he have been? Shane offered no solution of the problem.

"And what have you been doing? Have you been away?"

"Yes, I went to stay with the Manistres."

"Didn't you find the menage a little overpowering?"

"We didn't see too much of it."

"We?"

"Garth and I."

Shane smiled. "Do I have to warn you that Grace Manistre is an inveterate matchmaker?"

"You don't have to warn me of anything, thanks very much," said Mona, helping herself to more tea, but in the silence that followed she sat there by the window and thought: "Why are we talking this rubbish? Have we forgotten that a few miles away men are already killing each other? I thought Shane'd care awfully about that—and he doesn't."

This wasn't at all how she had imagined things. Shane's coming was to have been the key letting her into a rational world, and behold Shane's world was here revealed as something silly and trivial; worse than the world in which she had lived for the past three weeks, because that at least was serious and concerned with facts. Shane's world wasn't serious and was concerned with nothing at all. It offered her nothing she could clutch at: nothing of support or defence. This laconic, indifferent Shane, babbling of some girl or other he'd found to interest him, filled her with despair. She thought: I'd rather he were like everybody else—like mother, Garth, the newspapers. . . . But to be indifferent, not to care at all. . . .

"Well, and what has happened since Westmorland?"

She sat there, giving him the news. "Mark and Garth are training for commissions. Oh, I've told you that. Mark's at Salisbury, Garth somewhere in Surrey." (She did not add, "somewhere near Fiveways," nor that every time he came up on leave or cycled over to Fiveways when Mona happened to be staying there, he asked her to marry him.) "The drawing-room is given over to fine phrases and fine linen. Mother belongs to committees and does the work of six women better than any six women could possibly do it—and she doesn't approve of me. I don't approve of myself, if it comes to that. Greta's baby hasn't arrived yet and Reuben won't let himself be divorced, doesn't like the idea at all, apparently. Do you remember Greta's brother Miles? He's been medically examined six times since it began. He says he's tired of taking his clothes off and that he never believed before that there really are people who don't wash. Judy's in Lincolnshire with Aunt Beth, who has to be consoled for the loss of two sons, one to Canada and the other to the British cause. Aunt Maud has offered her services, and those of a staff of nurses, to the British

Government and been told to go home and sit still. She came home, all right, but she isn't sitting still. Mother has reminded us that they were telling Florence Nightingale that in eighteen-fifty-three. She says the military mind doesn't move at all." She paused, frowned and said, "Well, that seems to exhaust the News Agency."

"Not quite, surely. What about you?"

"Me? There's nothing about me. There's scarcely any me, if it comes to that. I got badly submerged when mother came in so heavily on the side of the war. I'd had such glorious visions, you see, of our going arm-in-arm to the stake." She moved away from the window, and threw herself into an arm-chair. "Got a cigarette? No, thanks, if they're only gaspers. I'm acquiring extravagant habits which mother likes about as much as she likes my posh cigarette-case which is lying about here somewhere."

Shane found it amid a litter of magazines and books with which Mona had evidently been beguiling some part of the afternoon. An affair of gold, stamped with Mona's monogram.

"But I thought your birthday was in February," said Shane.

"It is. There isn't any really decent excuse for the thing—hence mother's dislike of it. She doesn't approve of my . . . relationship with Garth Manistre."

"Your 'relationship'?"

"Yes, that was the word I used. You see, mother's a little difficult to please. She used to disapprove of my friendship with so many young men and now I've narrowed them down to Garth—or, rather, now that the war has done it for me—she doesn't like that any better."

Mona lighted one of her expensive cigarettes, looked at her watch, sighed and lay there smoking meditatively. Whenever she looked at Shane, smoking too, and silent, the old feeling of isolation, of desertion swept over her again. "It's hopeless, I can't get at him. I've never been able to get at him since he came back from Liepsic. Why did I ever imagine the war was going to make any difference?"

"When's the novel coming?"

"Any day. I expect the war will kill it."

"Killing's its job. Hallo, here's mother."

Eve came in, brisk, fit and hospitably minded. She welcomed Shane with considerable warmth, said that of course he must stay to dinner and began to explain how splendid Bayswater was. "More helpers everywhere than we have accommodation for! But why are we all sitting out here?"

"There's a lot of new bandage stuff occupying the drawing-room," Mona said. "Have you had any tea, and if not, do you want any?"

"Please. Come in here, Shane, and talk to me while I have it."

Half-way to the kitchen door Mona looked back at them across her shoulder.

"She'll tell you what regiment to join when your foot's better, Shane, and keep you usefully employed until it is. Mother's like Florence Nightingale: she finds jobs for everybody. Don't you, darling?"

"I haven't succeeded yet in finding one for you," her mother said, and moved on into the drawing-room.

But Shane stood still, as though the beauty of that thrown-back head robbed him of words or motion.

"Shane."

"Yes?"

"I should let mother down lightly about that girl, if I were you. It might be as well not to have met her in Switzerland or have gone on to Italy together. I would suggest difficulties on the homeward journey . . . the gallant-male-to-the-rescue sort of thing."

She smiled.

It was Eve who invited Shane to bring his friend to tea, and Eve who disapproved of her most when she arrived. Patricia Ramsden's aim, sartorially, like Grace Manistre's, was decorative, but her achievement was so different you might never have guessed it. Tall and well-made, her short hair, guiltless of wave or curl and several years too early to be designated "bobbed," was singularly incongruous. Her frock was a straight-cut bright-coloured affair kept in place, as far as it was

kept in place at all, by a girdle also brightly—and differently—coloured. It was Eve who said, later, that Miss Ramsden would “make a monk’s garb indecent.” Nevertheless, Patricia had brains, even if, in the opinion of Eve and her friends, she put them to some strange uses. Neither could Eve be expected to care overmuch for a woman who wore an air of saying, “Women are fools. Please observe that I am an exception.” Mona’s sense of humour, much more vigorous than that of her mother, came to her rescue there, however, and left her free to see that much of what Patricia Ramsden had to say was both good and interesting, even when she didn’t happen to agree with it. She saw, too, that in Patricia’s presence Shane talked openly of things for which she angled in vain as conversational topics, and whilst she combated that attitude of mind in Patricia which saw the war as a dog-fight from which the wise stood judicially apart, she envied her her certainty as she envied her mother hers and Mark and Garth theirs. Patricia looked at life from a new angle and that intrigued Mona’s interest in her just as the same quality in Garth had intrigued her interest in him. And she saw that Shane liked Patricia and liked to be with her for precisely the same reason that she liked Garth and liked to be with him.

Shane’s book came out at the end of November and about it Miss Ramsden was rapturously enthusiastic. Mona read it with a queer sense of distaste, remembering that Shane had said, “You’ll hate it.” She did.

“A young man goes to Germany to study music,” Eve summed up *Mirage*, when she found time to look at it. “He spends his time writing a novel and falling in love with a worthless girl. Then he comes home again. Autobiography more or less. Well, anybody can write a novel if you’ve only to write of yourself and throw in a little love-interest. I do Shane the credit of believing, however, that the love-story *isn’t* autobiography.”

But that was exactly what Mona could not do.

Mirage received a good—if scanty—Press and sold exactly four hundred copies. Eve’s comments were brief, but unanswerable.

One day early in nineteen-fifteen Manistre came up to town unexpectedly on leave, went on to his rooms in Chelsea and 'phoned Mona to meet him there—an appointment of which a thoughtful Providence kept Eve in ignorance by arranging that Garth's message should arrive exactly five minutes after she had departed to the scene of one or other of her numerous war activities. So Mona arrived in Chelsea to find a very perturbed and angry Garth and the wreckage of somebody else's tea.

"What's up?" she asked.

Garth explained. He had arrived to find Shane entertaining "a Miss Ramsden to tea."

"Well, why not? Shane pays his share of the beastly rent still. I suppose he makes the mistake of believing it is his home and that he is entitled to entertain in it whom he likes."

"Very well, then, I've intimated pretty plainly that the present arrangement will not be agreeable to me after this month. I'm not housing slackers, anyway."

"I see." Mona's voice, like her face, was expressionless. "And then Shane got annoyed and carried Miss Ramsden off?"

"Omitting, however, as you perceive, to clear up the mess they made."

"Yes," said Mona. "I do perceive that. What upset you?"

"Their attitude. . . ."

"To each other?"

"Oh, that didn't bother me—people's morals are their own affair. What I minded was the damned patronising contempt of that girl Ramsden. . . ."

"Towards you, you mean? You thought she was rude?"

"Thought? She *was* rude."

"I don't believe she means to be—that's her way. I feel she probably admired you tremendously in that get-up, but I'm sure she contradicted you."

She lighted a cigarette and regarded Garth for a second or two through the smoke of it.

"*Did* she contradict you, darling?"

Garth flushed.

"That hasn't anything to do with it. I found her a most unpleasant young woman."

"Because she thinks differently from you?"

"*Thinks!*" snorted Garth.

Mona smiled in that aggravating fashion of hers through the haze of her tobacco smoke. "Oh, I forgot. Other people, of course, *don't* think. They merely have opinions."

There was a silence, then Garth came and sat on the side of Mona's chair.

"We're wasting time," he said.

"Does it matter? So much time is being wasted just now."

Garth slipped an arm round her and put his face against hers.

"Shut up!" he said, "and be nice to me."

"Don't want to be nice to anybody!" she said.

"You're going to be nice to me. . . ."

His arm tightened and Mona did not resist. When had she ever resisted? But all the same, she hated him for his criticism of Shane Mostyn, and for all she endured his arms about her and his kisses upon her face and lips, it was of Shane she was thinking. For though her intercourse with him had grown into a painful thing, leading nowhere, she cherished, a dead thing, at her heart, the memory of their old friendship, not understanding in the least why it hurt her sometimes when she saw Shane and Patricia together. It never occurred to her to admit jealousy—either physical or intellectual—as a possible explanation: she saw only that in some way the feeling they had for each other had been destroyed and her mind saw the thing too fairly to put all the blame for that upon Patricia Ramsden, who, to do her justice, would have scorned to destroy anything in her path, finding it much pleasanter to ride heedlessly by. But what Mona looked for perpetually and could not find was some adequate reason for the slackness which had overtaken Shane, alike in his work and in his attitude to the War; for his reaction from all things they had ever cared about, his assumption of blatant indifference, his openly espoused creed of material well-being and physical satisfaction. She did not believe that Shane was hiding, as she was, from

facts : she saw that there was something more in it than that ; that in some way or other Shane had deteriorated, and try as she would she could not but associate that fact with his friendship for Patricia Ramsden. Nevertheless, she hated Garth as presently she hated her mother, for voicing the connection.

" If Miss Ramsden and Shane care for each other, why don't they get married ? " Eve asked. " There isn't anything against it, is there ? "

" Only their disinclination, I suppose," said Mona. " Everybody hasn't got your genius for marriage, darling. And there are quite a lot of arguments in favour of being a man's mistress rather than his wife."

Eve didn't ask what they were. She said : " Is Miss Ramsden's Shane's mistress ? "

Mona laughed. " Why ask me ? How should I know ? "

" I see," said her mother, " like father, like son."

Somewhere at the back of Mona's mind there stirred a faint vague memory of a tall gaunt man who had nursed her on his knee, told her stories and drawn funny pictures for her delectation, as Shane used to draw them for Judy's. . . . " Shane's father was very kind to me," she said. " I was very fond of him."

" Because he was kind to you ? " The old hard look tugged for an instant at Eve's mouth. " You're very like your father, you know. He could always find the most unsound reasons for liking the most unlikeable people. The only real basis for affection between human beings is that of respect."

" And yet," objected Mona, " I dislike quite a goodly percentage of the people I respect. Respect is one of the more chilly of the moral sentiments."

" For a modern girl you talk a great deal of nonsense sometimes."

Mona smiled through her cigarette smoke.

" Modern ? I think Greta was right, probably, when she said I wasn't modern. I don't think I am, you know, darling. Why, I don't even see that asking for money is an indignity no modern woman can possibly endure."

" You're modern enough to like all the privileges women of

other times have won for you without giving a thought to the difficulties by which they were obtained."

"Privileges?" said Mona.

"Freedom. To go where you like. To do what you want."

"I see. Freedom to be a doctor, to work in an office, to smoke, to swear—rather feebly, by the way." Mona smiled. "I don't really want any of those things very much, you know, mother."

"But you wanted to attend mixed art classes and draw from the nude. If you'd lived fifty years ago you'd have found it impossible."

"I wonder. Anyway, it was the fault of your generation, mother; you didn't make sufficient use of your chances. You had a lot of wars in your day—you should have made more use of them. Look at us, setting you an example. We shall have induced the war to yield us a vote before long, and leasemarrriages and divorce-while-you-wait. You were awfully slow and behind the times in the sixties and seventies. Am I hurting your feelings terribly? Sorry. . . . What's on this afternoon?"

"You have promised to come and sing to my wounded soldiers. Do try to remember, Mona, that they like cheerful songs."

"Mother, darling, they *don't*. They like something thoroughly sentimental—things about the dew and you and roses and stars and pale hands beside the Shalimar and somebody or other bending over you when you are dy-y-y-ing. . . . It can't really be good for them. I propose to substitute Purcell and Herrick and Arne . . . and Shane Mostyn."

"I really think you ought not to encourage that young man to think that . . ."

"Yes, I know. But I'm talking about his songs. You *know* everybody thinks they're charming. And you needn't look so apprehensive, either. I know you don't trust the Elizabethans: but these are perfectly respectable—a song of Shakespeare's about daffodils and Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet to the moon."

"Well, they sound all right," said Eve, who knew nothing

about music and thought that most songs, like most novels, were concerned with the least important things of life.

In April, nineteen-fifteen, Mona went down to Fiveways and stayed there a month, wasting, as Eve said, the fees paid for her at the Slade, and for no better reason, apparently, than that Fiveways and Garth's camp were so nearly located. But Eve was wrong. She went because she liked the country and because Jeremy Bentley was old and lived in the past. When she said that to herself it didn't sound like a reason at all, but she knew that it was. "When grandfather talks of the Germans," she wrote to her mother, "he is really thinking of the Russians. You wouldn't believe how easy it is to push him back into the Crimea."

Even to talk of some other war was a relief.

But Jeremy Bentley, no more than Eve, imagined that he was the attraction which brought his beautiful young granddaughter so frequently to stay with him. One day during that April visit, when she sat in his garden making a sketch of the Fiveways poplars in their April dress, he said to her: "Well, have you made up your mind about that young man yet? Are you going to marry him or not?"

Mona, fresh from a recent parting with Garth Manistre, looked up from her work and shook her head. "I don't know, gran'pa," she said.

"Why not? What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know that, either. I wish I did." She deepened the green on her palette and looked up from it abstractedly. "I wish *to God* I did."

This was one of the occasions when you were perfectly certain that Grandfather Bentley was nothing like as deaf as he sometimes pretended to be.

"You've been very badly brought up, young woman," he said, shaking his head. "My daughter has no idea of bringing up children. I always told her so."

"You're the first man who's ever accused mother of not having ideas," said Mona. "Most men think she has too many."

"Most men are afraid of your mother. How she ever found anybody to marry her was beyond me."

"Father thought there was nobody like mother."

"Eh? What say? . . . Nobody like her? Well, he ought to have been thankful for it. . . . And I daresay she suited your father . . . he'd got ideas of his own, too."

"So had you, grandfather. That idea of yours about England growing enough wheat to be self-supporting. . . . Mark says it was quite a probable one in the eighteen-fifties, before anyone had discovered the American market and the limitations of steam."

"Does he indeed?" said Jeremy. "Bah!" and Jeremy spat in derision upon the garden path.

It was Mona herself who supplied her mother with a very real reason for her objection to those prolonged stays at the house in Surrey. "I hope you won't mind, darling," she said when she reached home upon this occasion at the beginning of May, "but I've 'touched' Gran'pa Bentley for a studio at the bottom of the garden."

For once her assumption of ease was not too convincing. Her mother stared at her.

"'Touched'? Do you mean that you have asked your grandfather to incur the expense of building you a studio?"

"I always forget you don't speak our language, but that's a fairly good translation."

"Then of course I mind. . . ."

"But mother, we waste the garden so horribly now. You don't care about it, and neither do I . . . any longer. Why *shouldn't* I have a studio at the bottom of it?"

"I wasn't thinking of the garden. I don't mind your commandeering that, but it distresses me very much that you should lower yourself by coaxing things out of your grandfather and that you cannot see how *much* you lower yourself."

"Mother, you know gran'father gives you *nothing* unless you wheedle it out of him."

"An excellent reason for going without."

"I don't agree with you. Gran'father has nobody to spend his money on but us. Besides, I want the studio so badly.

You see, mother, there just isn't any place here where I can work. . . . You've brought the war inside. . . ."

Eve ignored that. "Is all this arranged?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it is. Garth is doing the plans."

"Then," said Eve, "there is surely no purpose in our remaining here discussing the matter further."

"Nobody ever had such really useful phrases as mother," Mona thought as she went slowly upstairs. "If I *had* told her first and she'd said 'Darling, it would distress me very much,' I couldn't possibly have gone on. And I *wanted* to go on. Mother, poor dear, is the sort of person who is born to be deceived. She sends some little bit of you burrowing underground. . . ."

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CHAPTER FOUR

AUGUST, nineteen-fifteen. Mark was in France, along with Miles Anderson and a multitude of other people. Under the ægis of the French Government Maud Norman had gone to Serbia, but Garth Manistre still cooled his heels upon the Surrey hills. Warsaw had fallen, a new landing had been effected in Gallipoli—and Shane Mostyn had brought Patricia Ramsden to tea.

The discovery that Patricia was a married woman had not helped Eve Norman to any favourable readjustment of her frequently-expressed belief that Shane was degenerating, reverting, as she put it, to type. Neither did she approve of Patricia's adoption of her maiden name, and remained indifferent to Mona's plea that as it was also her professional name she was entitled to use it. "She is not entitled to arouse misconceptions in men's minds," she said, "either you are married or you are not." Thus, characteristically, did Eve dispose of Patricia Ramsden and the problem she represented.

On this particular afternoon in August Mona drew her chair nearer the table and made her usual casual inquiry. "Sugar, Miss Ramsden?" not because she could not remember that Patricia liked sugar in her tea but because it was one of her poses to pretend that she couldn't. So did she contrive to keep Patricia outside that little intimate circle into which Shane had obviously meant her to be admitted.

"Two, please," said Patricia, "though I suppose a really unselfish person would take one, these days, and be thankful."

"Why?" asked Mona. "So tiring to assume a virtue if you have it not, and in this case so unnecessary, because we don't

happen to be short of sugar. I suspect Martha of an intrigue with the grocer."

Patricia smiled. So did Mona—her sweet, unreal smile that hid so much and deceived so many. Tea began. Shane said: "Have you read Pat's article in this week's *Signal*?"

"I?" Mona raised her eyebrows, so much darker than her hair and skin seemed to warrant. ("Of course she darkens them, Shane, don't be so idiotic. Nature doesn't play tricks like that.") "But I don't read articles on the war. Besides, I know the anti-arguments well enough and am always finding new ones. What I want is something unanswerable on the other side. I want something to make me believe in the war, just as I want something to make me believe in God."

Patricia tactfully left the Almighty out of it.

"I'm afraid my article won't help you," she said. "May I have some more tea?"

"It won't help anybody, will it, in the *Signal*?" Mona asked, and her hand hovered vaguely over the sugar basin. "Surely the Signalites know the arguments as well as I do?"

"We must do what we can," suggested Miss Ramsden, and began to develop the theme. Mona didn't listen but her thought was bitter. She hated Patricia because she was hard and untouched—and because she herself was not. She hated her for standing there above the battle, feeling nothing, just considering in cold blood the merits of the fighters. Two excellent reasons. Mona was not entirely unaware that there were others. Her sweet, unreal smiling hid them all.

"It's been a dull week," she said presently, "is there really nothing to cheer us except this assurance of the dissemination of the gospel among the converted?"

"Nothing," said Shane, "except the fact that I am about to offer my services to a country which seems so far to have managed excellently without them. That ought to cheer some people up."

The colour came into Mona's face. That sweetly artificial smile did not so much fade as freeze on her lips. There was a little pause before she said, "What are you going to join?"

"The Air Force if it will have me, since neither a military

nor a naval career appeals to me overmuch. The pilots, so I gather from the popular magazines, have a very good time of it, on the whole. They give dinner parties, drink champagne, fly drunk better than sober and always crawl out from the wreckage with a nonchalant air and a cigarette. I hope the acquisition of so much *esprit de corps* will not be beyond me and that failure to acquire it does not involve court-martial."

As though the subject bored her, Miss Ramsden rose and went a little ostentatiously out of the room. With the click of the door Mona rose up from her seat and came over quickly to Shane.

"Can't you be serious even over this?" she asked him.

She could make nothing of his face: the mask was well down. But she was inexplicably hurt by the familiar gesture of the lifted head, by the mockery—terribly new and unfamiliar—in the deep-set eyes.

"Least of all over this, my dear, believe me. Pat, you know, hasn't yet decided whether her principles demand that she chucks me or not."

"And that's important, is it?"

"As important as anything else. What about your principles? Do you have to chuck me?"

"I? For joining up?" She flushed. "Oh, as long as you do something definite, what does it matter? It's the lukewarm people I hate. To be any good you've got to believe something passionately."

"It sounds so horribly strenuous, and so horribly like your mother,"

She looked suddenly very reserved and distant, but in her heart there was a wound opening and shutting in strange pain. She said nothing, just shrugged her shoulders and threw her burnt-out cigarette down into the fireplace.

And after all, the Air Force turned down Shane's application on medical grounds, a fact, however, which did not prevent the Army doctors from accepting him, grading him as A1 and sending him forthwith into training.

"I could have done better for him than that," Garth said to Mona when next he cycled over to see her at Fiveways. Mona resented the air he wore of the Bestower of Gifts, as she resented his wails of frustration because an obstinate Government kept him still in England and she would not help him, as Mona herself put it, to make the time pass a little more quickly by marrying him. She agreed with her grandfather that if she wasn't going to marry him she was seeing too much of him, but yet was unable to prevent herself from seeing him when the opportunity presented itself. It was pleasant there on the sunny side of the hedge with Garth, but the idea of remaining there for ever left her a little aghast. "I'd like to fall in love in the evening and get married in the morning," she thought, "with no time to think. But life isn't as simple as all that." Life, indeed, was not simple at all, and thinking about it complicated it most dreadfully. Obstinate, too, it refused to write itself down in terms of marriage with Garth Manistre and the sunny side of the hedge.

She did not understand why. Even when Shane came home on leave, and she saw his face, white and set, above his wretchedly-fitting khaki, she knew only that there were bonds between herself and Shane that did not exist between herself and Garth. "Shane and I are the same kind of human being. Our minds work in the same way, register the same sort of impressions—and we aren't sure about anything on God's earth." (She saw herself reeling away from Garth's certitude as from some hydra-headed monster.) "Shane and I think alike. We *do*, though he pretends now that we scarcely know each other. But that's all part of the pose. Don't I *know*? Aren't even our miserable poses the same? We can't help each other. We've got the same weaknesses. We get flattened out by the same things. . . ."

As the summer advanced she saw less and less of Shane. Either he didn't get leave or he spent it elsewhere than at Marne House; and Mona learned to check any discussion as to his whereabouts by that faint air she wore of half-humorous, half-scornful indifference. That it masked something neither humorous nor scornful had not yet occurred to Eve. It had

not occurred to her at the end of July when she reluctantly packed her trunks and prepared to carry Judy off to the south-coast sea, to which Mona steadfastly refused to accompany them. She went on with her work, attended divers meetings with diverse objects, and cycled down to Fiveways at week-ends, carrying with her always that little air of indifference which covered so much—and so inadequately.

When at last she allowed herself to be beguiled into joining her mother and sister she was fagged and white and exigent ; and a brown, blithe and nerveless Judy met her at the station and assured her cheerfully that she looked a wreck.

"You've got dark rings under your eyes and your face's too thin, but even that doesn't make you look a sight. Even being off-colour seems to suit you, if it's any consolation to you to know it."

Torn from her bandages and splints, her committee meetings and dispensing, there was an unusual, forlorn look about her mother that even Mona found amusing. Eve on holiday was an anomaly. At breakfast she asked plaintively, "What do we do until luncheon time?"

"Swim," said Judy.

"But I don't swim," said Eve.

"How funny," said Judy to Mona, "to hear mother say she doesn't 'do' anything."

"Girls weren't taught to swim when I was young," said Eve. "It was considered most unladylike, unless, like your Aunt Maud, you were lucky enough to have a father who didn't know the meaning of the word."

"I'll teach you to swim," said Judy, "in a jiffy."

Eve declined the offer because "you don't care about making an exhibition of yourself at fifty-two."

"Well, what's wrong with a bathe?"

But Eve did not care, apparently, for the queer pastime known as "bathing," which consisted of ducking yourself up and down on the edge of the water ; so she was left sitting on a pebbly beach, a prey to idleness, whilst Mona and Judy went for books and newspapers to keep her quiet whilst they had their dip.

It was coming back that they saw Shane and Patricia. Shane in his shabby khaki, Patricia as unmistakably garbed as ever. Nobody but Patricia would have walked abroad in a jumper of such quarrelsome hue. They turned out of a side street and walked on a dozen yards ahead of Mona and Judy, who both stood suddenly still, until Mona dived instinctively round the corner from which Shane and Patricia had just emerged.

"Judy, come here," she called softly. And after a moment's hesitation Judy came. "Don't you want them to see us?" she asked.

"They'd hate seeing us—at least, Shane would."

"But I've seen them before."

"Has mother?"

"She hasn't said so. I don't think they've seen me. I've never been on top of them like this before. . . . Oh, look, Mona, they're going into that little house we've admired so much. . . . The Lilacs, don't they call it?"

Mona looked. She saw Patricia shutting the little white gate, Shane fitting a key into the lock. She said: "Judy, don't tell mother, *please*. . . ."

"Rather not," said Judy. "Mother wouldn't understand. She's so old-fashioned. She hasn't *liked* your going to Ghyll House when Garth's been there or your seeing him so much at Fiveways. . . . Besides, she's fearfully down on Shane, as it is. She thinks he's ungrateful because he never comes near us nowadays and she thought he ought to have joined up earlier. Rot I call it. You do have to leave people alone. Mother won't, you know. And she doesn't like Patricia, anyway. But I don't see why *we* couldn't have caught them up and spoken to them. After all, *we're* not prejudiced people, like mother."

"Judy, I don't *want* to speak to them."

Judy stared at her. "All right, keep your wool on. But why won't you? You needn't pretend you aren't interested in Shane, anyway. Any girl, 'cept me, would be interested in the only man of her acquaintance who hasn't gone off the deep end about her. All the same, I can't see what he sees in Patricia Ramsden, or Desmond, or whatever she calls herself these days."

"I can, rather," Mona said.

"Good Lord! What?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Wouldn't I? You're as bad as mother. I understand a lot more than you think. I'm fifteen, and this is an enlightened age."

"Yes, I'd noticed that," Mona said.

By a somewhat circuitous route they got back to the beach, pressed newspapers and books upon their mother, who sat there looking as though she had long ago realised the futility of getting anyone to do anything as quickly as she could do it herself. Mona and Judy sat down on the beach beside her and, until Judy's head got in the way of her operations with the paper, she seemed to have forgotten their existence. "I thought you girls were going to bathe," she said then.

"We are, when those two fat ladies have finished with the ocean," said Judy.

Mona said nothing. She sat there hugging her knees, gazing out to sea. She did not move when Judy went off to her bathing tent, nor when a minute or so later she ran halloing down to the sea. Eve looked up from her paper and waved her hand.

"Don't stay in too long," she called. "Have you changed your mind?" she asked Mona, who nodded.

"My dear, you're as variable as the wind."

"I know. Can I have the book page, if there is one?"

There seldom was, these days, but this was a lucky morning. Mona bent her head over the page but saw nothing that was written upon it. In her mind one thought went round and round. "Why did I pretend I didn't know about Shane and Patricia? I've always known—I've only pretended I didn't." Had she pretended, too, about Shane and herself? Surely she had known how things were with herself since for the first time she had seen Shane's face, rigid in its mould of young misery and disgust, above his wretched khaki. And if she had really known that, where, just precisely, did Garth Manistre come in?

She looked at her mother reading steadily through her paper,

casualty list and all, and she thought : " She wouldn't understand : she'd never *see*. . . . " Nevertheless, she said suddenly : " Mother, suppose you loved two men at the same time. . . . "

Eve looked at her with the little amused air that came so frequently to her, these days. " But you *can't* love two men at the same time," she said.

Mona had known she would say that—quite simply and sanely, and never see for a moment how dreadfully possible the thing was.

She said : " You mean that you'd really love one better than the other, and that presently you'd find it out ? But mightn't it perhaps be that you just loved them *differently* ? "

Eve's amusement grew.

" My dear child," she said, " you've missed your vocation. You should have gone in for politics. In the Diplomatic Service you'd have been invaluable."

" You never take me seriously, mother."

" I hope you don't take yourself seriously, on these subjects," Eve said, and Mona was grateful to her for getting back to her casualty lists. She could not talk to anyone to whom the problems of life presented themselves with such hideous simplicity. Why had she imagined she could ? She sat there gazing far out to sea, where, in the windless day, a yacht dropped very slowly down the bay.

Oh, give it up. . . . You weren't getting anything out of the argument but a headache. And when you remembered the little white house on the front, wasn't the problem a good deal simpler than you thought ? " Two men—and one of them cares and the other doesn't." There it was, baldly stated. It did seem rather to eliminate Shane. Keep your mind on the little white house . . . and the things as eloquent that you'd known of before . . . and wasn't he, perhaps, eliminated altogether ?

He was not. It just wasn't possible to eliminate Shane—it was like cutting off a bit of oneself. Neither did he eliminate himself, not by the things he said, the things he did and did not do. He remained. His presence was emphatic and obdurate, so that it would neither be denied nor ignored.

She thought : " I've got to make up my mind. I can't go on like this. If he could marry Patricia that might be a solution. Married, he might not be so overpoweringly there. . . . If I could *think* of him as belonging to somebody else ! I'm not drawn to marriage, but I respect it. I'd respect anybody else's claim, I think. But he *can't* marry her. . . ."

Checkmate.

She put down the book page and got up.

" If you don't mind, darling, I think I'll bathe after all. . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMER waned. Christmas came and went, bringing no sight of Shane and no word. Early in the New Year Miles Anderson was killed in Flanders over the taking of half a mile of German trenches. Verdun raged. . . .

It was April when Grace Manistre's telegram arrived. *Garth ordered abroad will you spend week with us Ghyll House.*

Eve, shewn the telegram, said only: "Is this young man still bothering you to marry him?"

"It doesn't matter," Mona told her, "I'm used to it. And Garth is going to France. I couldn't possibly refuse, even if I didn't want to go. Besides, up in Westmorland, I'm like Wordsworth—I forget all the rest of the world."

She went off to Euston with an unexpected air of ecstasy that Eve found slightly ridiculous, but a calm, unexcited Mona came back, her ecstasy hanging about her like a tattered frock, and an engagement ring on her finger.

People were pleased about the engagement, even Eve, to whom the existing close friendship had been by no means satisfactory. Though she had not expected Mona "to peter out like this" in prospective matrimony at the age of twenty, at least, she comforted herself, it would be a very suitable match. She had no fault to find with Garth Manistre, whom she regarded as a "nice youth," not prone to wild-oat sowing, who belonged to decent people and looked like doing excellently in a respectable profession. This view of her son might have amused Grace Manistre had she been aware of it, for "decent" and "nice" were scarcely the words the Manistres were in the habit of hearing applied to themselves. But Grace Manistre, up in town for the last two days of her son's leave,

came calling with him at Marne House, most beautifully typifying her name and adoring everything and everybody. Really, she said to Eve, it had worried her most dreadfully that Garth had shown such an inability to fall in love. "I began to think he would never find anybody, or else get caught by some really impossible creature," she explained. "It didn't matter *how* many nice girls you collected for him he was just charming to them all, and then got them all most dreadfully mixed up. *Most* disheartening, dear Mrs. Norman. He simply *wouldn't* fall in love—not even ever so temporarily. Not to have any 'affairs' at all—well, I used to tell him, it made us women look so superfluous."

She waited for Eve to assure her, as people always did assure her, that "nothing could make *you* look superfluous, dear Mrs. Manistre." But Eve offered no such incense. She said in her quiet fashion: "But we modern women, of course, expect morality in our sons as much as in our daughters, and was grateful that Mona was not there to add in her cynical modern fashion: "Or as little!" This stupid modern posing!

It seemed to Mona that as long as she lived she would remember that evening. Late April and unusually warm, it was beautiful enough to be remembered for ever. The long windows of Eve's drawing-room were thrown wide and the moonlight came pouring across the dimness that was the garden, where everything stood perfectly still, the apple-tree a blur of white at the bottom. She was destined always, she thought, to get Garth mixed up with the scenic effects, and backed away from them just as that young man seemed to have decided to pay special attention to them. "Come out and look at the apple-tree in the moonlight," he said, and did not see the miserable stricken look that came over Mona's face as she followed him down the steps. He thought her merely capricious when she flung away from his kiss down there beneath the apple-tree.

"Why not? What on earth's the matter?" he said to her. "Oh, no, not here—I can't possibly kiss you here!" "Place swarming, I suppose, with tender memories. . . . That it?" "My father planted that tree when he was a little boy,"

she said. "It was in bloom when he died. It was the last thing we looked at together."

"Sorry," said Garth; "I'm a clumsy ass."

He came and put his arm through hers, and even as she thought: "Beastly of me to say that—it wasn't the real reason. I'm deceiving him. I always *am* deceiving him," the old ecstasy of the body ran through her. But how did you say to the man you've just promised to marry: "I can't kiss you here because, just at this spot, I know so absolutely that you're the wrong man." You couldn't, of course. "Come in and see my work," she said instead.

The studio was in darkness, but the door was unlocked. They went in. He pulled away the hand she stretched out for the electric-light switch and held her, there in the darkness, crushed tightly against him. She did not resist. The familiar spell bound her fast. She yielded herself to his embrace, gave herself up to his kisses as one offering herself up to some force outside and stronger than herself. Some little bit of her was not so much violated as annihilated, so that even in her abandon there was something almost sacrificial. All that ecstasy of the body and none—none at all—of the spirit. There was the amazing thing. Because of it she stood quite still when he released her, quite still in the darkness, her face hidden in her hands.

"Turn on the light," she said.

He turned it on and she saw with relief that he had forgotten her. She remembered that he had not seen this room of his planning before, saw that he was caught up in a delight and satisfaction that had nothing whatever to do with her. He was like a child with a toy. Considered as a child, with all the world for toy, Garth Manistre was a very lovable person. "I'm a toy, too," she thought, "a little more precious at the moment than all the others." She smiled, moving about the room drawing blinds and curtains. She saw that he had picked up her recently finished statuette of her brother. She said nothing.

Garth praised the statuette of Mark enthusiastically; it seemed to her extravagantly, even, and as she looked at it she

thought : "Shane would have seen at once what is the matter with it." But she was glad that Garth had not, since it would have disturbed her knowledge of him. She could not bear it, she thought, if Garth became unexpected, stepped out of the shell of understanding she had created for him. Already, almost without being aware of it, she was beginning to depend upon Garth's invariability. It was comforting to know just exactly where you were and what you might expect. Comforting now to be able to say with quiet indifference : "He doesn't really care about that side of me at all. He isn't really interested in my work. He doesn't take it seriously. A nice little toy. A clever little toy, even. He wants me to wear nice frocks, stop bothering 'about things you can't help,' be charming to him and to his friends . . . and spend his money."

Her smile deepened as he turned with the little statuette in his hand, a little frown puckering his handsome brow and proving his mind elsewhere.

"Mona, why can't we be married at once? There's still time for a Special Licence."

"I don't want a Special Licence," she said.

"You don't want to be married?"

"You twist my words," she said.

"But, darling girl, there's no other way. No Special Licence, no marriage."

"I accept that. No marriage." She smiled. "Yet."

Garth hurriedly deposited the bronze Mark upon its shelf and came over to her. "Look here, my dear, suppose anything happened? I'm going to France. We've known each other for years. We ought to have been engaged long ago. We're frightfully fond of each other. Why wait any longer? Why do you fight shy of marriage like this? It isn't as though you've got cranky ideas about the subject, like that Ramsden woman."

Mona smiled. "No, I've quite an absurd respect for the marriage ceremony," she said.

"Well then?"

"That's all. If I respected it less I might have married you long ago."

"But how do I know, even now. . . ."

"That I will ever marry you?" She smiled. "My dear, I have also a quite absurd respect for my word. We had better go back."

She had a sudden desire to get away from the manifest longing in his eyes.

Like a patient waiting guest the house received them. Eve had drawn her muslin curtains across the face of the night, and Grace Manistre was saying as they entered: "My dear, we have a very great deal to congratulate each other upon."

"There's an awfully jolly moon," Garth said, a trifle hurriedly. "You people ought to go out and look at it."

Nobody disputed that, but nobody did more than glance condescendingly at it through Eve's Madras muslin curtains, and presently there was music and more conversation. Garth seemed to enjoy neither, for afterwards when Judy was standing at the door whistling hideously for a taxi, he drew Mona back into the shadow of the hall.

"You've been beastly to me," he grumbled, "and God knows when I shall see you again."

Either her face was very tender or the shadows were stamping the impress of tenderness upon it. Her mocking air of the evening vanished. She said: "Sorry, darling."

"Can't I see you again, once, somehow?"

"To-morrow? In the morning? I won't go down to the Slade."

"That's no use. I meant alone."

To-morrow at this time he would be on his way to France. She took the thought deliberately into her mind, paused to look at it.

"There's to-night," she said slowly.

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"In the studio?"

"At twelve."

He pulled her up to him with that fierce gesture which made her always so sorry for him. She was sorry for him now. Her eyes looked remorsefully into his. She had given

him a shabby evening. She really had been "beastly,"—mocking, hard, capricious. She had sung Shane's songs: she had deliberately dragged his name into the conversation and kept it there; she had been cynical, amusing and a little ill-tempered. And not because she had forgotten that this was Garth's last day, but because she could not bear to remember. The sight of his happy, prosperous youth most terribly produced this mood in her, this mood of mockery and caprice. But now she saw him as one of those millions enduring the unendurable, and as she yielded herself to the momentary fierceness of his embrace, the tears stood in her eyes. She drooped her mouth to his in very pity.

A tiny breeze was wandering through the apple-tree when Garth let himself out through the garden gate. Like a pale beauty who has been out too late, the moon was slipping slowly down the sky, and as he walked across the park a gentle rain began.

Mona sat on the rug before her dwindling fire, trying not to think. She heard the gently-rising wind that stirred the pink and white of the apple-tree and ran beside Garth as he strode home across the park. She was aware that something was stealing in to her from out the dying night, seeking to impose itself upon her. She shut up her heart against it. She would not think. . . . If only one could make one's mind a *real* blank, not thinking, even, of not thinking! That was what she wanted. So she sat there, thrusting back her thoughts, emptying her mind.

And then Shane Mostyn came and sat down in it, as he had a way of doing when she was off her guard, when she sat quiet, her mind swept and garnished. "I can't bear it," she thought.

She rose, stretched her arms above her head and went out, locking the door after her and standing a moment quite still outside it, as if she listened for something.

"It might almost be the guns," she said to herself, but she knew, even as she said it, that it was only the sound of distant,

all-night traffic and the voice of the wind which stirred the apple-tree and ran at Garth's side across the park.

She went in.

Breakfast. Porridge, bacon and a headache—and Eve's voice, not irritable or complaining, but stating a plain fact. "My dear child, if you will sit up to such an hour over your work, you must expect a headache!"

Letters. Two for Mona and neither of any importance whatsoever. From Shane, as usual, nothing. He neither wrote nor came. Something frantic tearing at something inside her. Surely it was outrageous that he did not write—even if he did not get leave he might write!

("Leave? Of course he gets leave!" She remembered Garth saying that to her recently, and rather snappily. "*Of course* he gets leave!" And then: "Do you want me to tell you what he does with it?" She didn't, she had said, and remembered now the bored indifference with which she had masked her hideous fear that he would. "People's morals are their own affair!")

She wondered if Garth would ever say that to her again. . . .

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CHAPTER SIX

IT was very wet the next day and Mona disappeared into her studio immediately after breakfast and was no more seen by her family until at four o'clock she walked into the drawing-room and explained that she had been driven from work by a return of yesterday's violent headache. And in the drawing-room Eve and Judy were entertaining Greta Mardinor and her mother to tea.

Even while Mona shook hands with them and permitted them to kiss her cheek, which was Mona's idea of the conventional feminine greeting, she could see Shane's letter upon the mantelshelf. It must have come by the three o'clock post. Mean of them not to have brought it out to her. Here was at least one disadvantage of the newly-finished studio. Nobody, if it was wet, cared to put on a mackintosh and come down the garden-path to your place of isolation. Invariably, on bad days, you waited for your letters.

Months since she had heard from Shane. The pain of them pressed upon her now surprisingly—all the accumulated pain of that dreary interval. Months, too, since she had seen him walking there by the sea with Patricia. She would not think of that. There were other things she would not think of, either. She looked at Shane's letter with indifferent eyes. And indifferent the voice in which she asked to be allowed to read it.

They smiled at her as she took it down, ran her finger beneath the envelope flap and drew out the contents. Mrs. Anderson watched her because she did really care to watch her. "I never saw anybody who got naturally into such charming poses," she thought. "So graceful. Men would find her

fascinating even if she hadn't got that beautiful face. She's very like that aunt of hers who died . . . aristocratic-looking creature. . . . She looks cold, too, like her mother, only I don't believe she is." Greta watched her for reasons quite other, and which might have explained why she was not surprised when Mona suddenly crushed the letter in her hand and stood quite still staring out above their heads at the rain.

"Any news, dear?" Eve asked.

Mona started, stuffed the letter into her jumper pocket, and came over to the tea-tray.

"Shane has gone to France."

She might have been saying: "To the post." But Eve, glancing upwards, saw that she would not meet her eye, was aware that she was doing a lot of unnecessary things with the lace edge of the tray-cloth.

"Without saying good-bye? How *like* him!"

"He couldn't fit us in, he says. The notice seems to have been very short."

"But I thought. . . . Surely Garth and Mark . . ."

"Darling, Shane's a private and the Army isn't a democratic institution. You do cherish such a lot of beautiful illusions. Shane sends his love. . . . He sends his love especially to you, mother."

"Extraordinary young man! When did he go?"

"To-day." She glanced back at the clock. "He's at Dover by now. . . . Is this for Greta? No, lemon for me, please." (Dover . . . France, Dover . . . France. . . . Oh, God! there were no other words in the language.)

She said little during tea, which was remarkable for nothing in the way of conversation, save that it revealed the fact that Greta Mardinor had later information concerning Mark than Mark's mother, who said, a little frigidly, "I didn't know you and Mark corresponded, my dear."

And while Greta fumbled with her answer, Judy got up to operate the gramophone which represented Jeremy Bentley's latest capitulation to the forces of cajolery.

(Dover . . . France . . . Dover. . . . No other words at all, nor ever would be!)

A beautiful voice began to sing Louise's song from Charpentier's opera, "*Depuis le jour où je me suis donnée.*" For half a minute or so, unbearably sweet and clear, the melody spilled itself out upon the room, then Mona rose and lifted the needle from the disc. The melody dropped forlornly into silence.

"Sorry, Ju," she said. "But I just can't stand Edvina's voice to-day."

An astonished and injured Judy protested vigorously.

"Well, heaven knows *I* don't care for the classics. I put it on for you—because you've always been so mad on *Louise* ever since you and Shane went to hear it that time."

Mona was aware that Greta's amber-coloured eyes were fixed upon her face.

"I know. But I just can't stand it to-day. . . . Has anybody got any aspirin?"

She knew what Greta was thinking.

(Dover . . . France . . . Dover . . . France. . .)

What did it matter what Greta was thinking?

Besides, Greta was wrong.

So very wrong that Mona wanted to laugh when she thought of it. Why didn't somebody say something amusing?

"You'll find some aspirin upstairs on my dressing-table—if the head's really bad." Eve said, "Let Judy get it for you."

No, that certainly wasn't in the least funny. She'd want a much better excuse than that. She rose and went out hurriedly.

Inside her mother's room, clutching the aspirin bottle to her breast, she was monstrously overtaken by her outrageous laughter. Greta thought that she and Shane. . . . No, there never was anything funnier than that. She sat down weakly on the bed, stuffed her handkerchief in her mouth and laughed and laughed, a crescendo of insane merriment, with one lucid interval, wherein she thought, quite calmly, "I'm having hysterics. . . . How absurd, because I despise hysterical females. . . ."

But at least the performance was a private one. She had Judy's ragtime to thank for that.

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BOOK V

MONICA AND SHANE

CHAPTER ONE

JUDY was quoting Browning : *Grow old along with me ! The best is yet to be, The last of life for which the first was made.* . . . "Funny," said Judy, "how few people seem to agree with him !"

Mona Norman was having a tea-party in her studio at the bottom of the garden, because it was the twenty-fifth of February, nineteen-nineteen, and her twenty-third birthday ; and also because it was Mark's first day of civilian liberty. But already she was a little crushed by so much enthusiasm and gaiety, so that she did not remember that both were three-parts relief because the war had come to an end, and because everybody present was tremendously sorry for Mona and wanted to cover up her grief with their decent veil of words and laughter. "Poor kid !" they thought, each in their several ways, "Beastly luck, happening like that right at the end. . . . The poor kid !"

Well enough aware that her friends were thinking these things and thus excusing her lack of zest in the conversation, Mona sat where the fire made a yellow lantern of her hair and alabaster of her face and neck. One little bit of her was engaged in thinking herself a fraud : all the rest was a blur of pain and memory that surely proved the fraud a less thorough affair than she supposed. No one had turned on the electric switches, but the fire was very bright and made hard points of light upon the crockery scattered about the room ; upon Mona's little

statuette of Mark just behind Shane's head and upon faces and forms of the talkers. Things stood out queerly from their owners, betraying an unexpected individuality of their own; somebody's shoes, a brooch, a pair of spectacles, a white arm, a ring on a finger, a band of gold on somebody's arm, the glowing tips of cigarettes. For everybody was smoking save Eve, who never had time, and Greta Mardinor, who preserved the more Victorian of the feminine virtues and was growing fat upon them.

Of Judy, with her chair pushed well back into a corner away from the fire, there was nothing this afternoon but her scornful young voice, rising out of the dimness like Truth from her well, Mona thought, only—was it quite the Truth she uttered? Shane, too, to whom the shining shoes belonged, sat well back in the shadow, watching the light upon Mona's hair, as Mark watched it upon Greta's; but whereas Shane did it stealthily from his dark corner, Mark was taking no precautions about it at all. The firelight played fully upon the face he turned openly and frankly to Greta curled up upon her tuffit in the middle of the floor, taking no part in the conversation and not listening to it. Browning and all the poets! What were they to Greta Mardinor (aware that Mark was thinking her hair very pretty in the firelight), but so many names in an English syllabus, now happily a thing of the past?

A jumble of irrelevant talk tumbled out into the room that the smoke wreaths seemed to adorn like so many ghostly festoons, whilst the thoughts ran up and down in Mona's mind, hurting her, and she was suddenly afraid to look at the centre of the hearth-rug in case she should see Garth Manistre standing there lighting his pipe and looking at her the while with an expression on his face as terribly familiar as the room; not familiar *to* her alone, but *with* her. It gave so much away, that look of his! Extraordinary that nobody ever guessed!

Here, now, in this room whose familiar firelight aspect put out fingers that touched her to pain, it was suddenly terrible to her that anybody had ever looked at her like that; more terrible by far than the fact that Garth Manistre would never again come here in the flesh. For Garth's death had surprised,

quite as much as it had hurt, her ; she had never ceased to see it as supremely ridiculous that after all his tremendous luck he should have been mortally wounded in the fighting of that last day of war. Yet even now it consoled her to remember that he had slipped out of unconsciousness into death without, apparently, one single thought or remembrance of her—of *them*. She wanted nothing whatever at this particular moment save to know for certain that down there in the French earth Garth slept quietly, oblivious of the truth. "I'd hate him to know that after all I cheated him, for I meant him to have *something*. Surely he has forgotten me—forgotten *us*? Oh, I can't bear this room in the firelight!"

So difficult to believe he was not there before the fire, lighting his pipe, looking at her across the length of it with that wise intimate glance. No, no, he was dead. She was glad he was dead. Ah, yes, but he was not *dead enough*. . . .

And Shane was saying: "Edinburgh couldn't have kept out Sophia Jex-Blake if it hadn't been able to say to her, 'We can't alter our constitution because one woman petitions us!' The whole university couldn't have kept out a hundred Sophias. The point is: Where were the ninety-and-nine?"

"Engaged, darling, on the man-pleasing stunt!" said Judy. "It's lots easier to be beautiful than clever."

"It's lots easier to be beautiful than *good*," said somebody who only laughed softly into the darkness when somebody else said good-humouredly: "Well, you should know, darling, you've been both."

Back there in the shadows Mona smiled, watched other people's smiling. What idiotic things people said! She wished everybody would go. They would never go. . . .

Someone was talking now of Mary Wollstonecraft, of Mary's letters to Imlay. Imlay, the timber merchant. Who would have heard of him but for Mary? "One simply can't understand how a woman like Mary . . . and look at that *débâcle* on Putney Bridge . . . !"

"No, no," Mona's heart was crying, "do *not* look at it, nor at those pitiful letters. Such things are not to be looked at!" It is chilly there on Putney Bridge in November, seventeen-

hundred-and-something. Move on quickly, somebody, into February, nineteen-nineteen. It is long since the ink dried on those passionate pages, the tears on Mary's cheeks! Did she, Mona wondered, ever forget? Did those two last years of life with Godwin ever really make up? Did anything ever really "make up" for an *affaire* Imlay?

"If you had been born even fifty years ago," Eve was saying in that comfortable common-sense voice of hers, "you would have understood well enough why Mary Wortley Montagu advised women to hide whatever brains they were born with. You modern girls don't realise how hardly your freedom has been won. You accept it. That it meant sacrifice or pain or unhappiness for the women of yesterday and a thousand yestereids never enters your head."

Freedom? Mona shrank back again into the shadows. No woman who ever loved was ever really free. From the shackles that love forged, no human ingenuity could ever release her. Didn't her mother know that? She had been in love with father. . . . But her mother simplified her problems so that they ceased to be problems, or had there, once, been a time when this one had resisted simplification? "And am I," thought Mona, "the horrible result?"

The talk drifted by. None of these people had personal problems to solve; they were merely talking for talking's sake, because it was good to sit here in the firelight, knowing that the war was over and life beginning again. . . . But every time Mona glanced across at that dim figure with the absurdly illuminated shoes, or heard its owner's voice pressing home a point in the discussion, she realised afresh the urgency of the problem she herself had to solve. And suddenly she wanted the conversation to go on for ever, because she could not bear what she knew would happen when the last word was said.

The exodus began, led by Greta who stood a long time at the door obviously hoping that somebody would ask her to stay to dinner. Nobody did. Gradually the room emptied. Eve was going and Judy. Judy with what Mona recognised despairingly for sisterly tact, Eve with letters to write. And

at the door, which she had reached and opened before anybody else could do it for her, she paused. "Oh, Shane," she said, "you'll stay to dinner, of course?"

"Thanks very much," said Shane.

The door shut and he and Mona were alone—in there alone with the firelight and that ghost with the wise intimate gaze. She had known all the afternoon that this must happen—ever since at lunch her mother had said: "Oh, by the way, I've asked Shane to come in to tea with the others. . . . We've rather been neglecting him lately." So it was really her mother's fault. At least in that reflection there was a certain element of humour.

She was absurdly grateful that, in going, nobody had turned up the light. She sat quite still in her chair, conscious that Shane, with his back to the door, was as still as she. The firelight was failing, but through the dusk she could feel his eyes hunting her out in her dim corner, and as though she could not bear it any longer, she pushed back her chair, emerged slowly from the shadows and stood with a threadbare gesture of indifference with one foot held out to the diminishing fire.

She knew that Shane had left the door and was coming towards her. Without turning her head, she was yet aware that he was standing, now, just behind her: if the light had been better he might have seen the treacherous colour creeping up the white nape of her neck. But the firelight was merciful: she remained gold and alabaster, quiet as an image.

"Would you rather I went?" he asked her.

She said, "I don't know."

"You must know."

He came nearer, tossed his unfinished cigarette into the fire, and suddenly laid his hands upon her shoulders. He was appalled by the rigidity of her young body beneath his hands before she turned swiftly in his grasp to cling to him. For a second he saw nothing but the white beauty of her upturned face, then his grasp tightened, his mouth sought hers. He had a sense of her bewildered, feeble resistance before she yielded herself to his embrace and returned him kiss for kiss. Then resistance again in which she drew herself out of his arms and

sat down suddenly, as if her strength had that instant failed her. She knew him there at her side, heard his voice: "Are you going to tell me you didn't mean it?"

She said nothing—just looked at him once then away again quickly. She felt his hand on her shoulder.

"Well then?"

With averted face she sat gazing into the fire, twisting her fingers together in her lap. But still she said nothing. A horror of words was creeping over her like a heavy pall. Only her hands moved, ever so slightly in her lap.

"Darling, do answer me."

She looked up at him with the air of one trapped, at bay.

"Don't you *know*?" she said.

"Why, you're sorry, you mean . . . about this?"

"Oh, I'm not sorry . . . I'm glad, even though I've been trying to prevent it ever since you came back. . . . But it can't go on."

"It *must* go on!"

"You only say that because you don't *know*. . . ."

He said, staring down upon her in the firelight, his hands in the pockets of his loose jacket: "Do you really think I *don't*?"

Even in the firelight, he was aware of something new in the little mobile face turned up to him. What was it? Gratitude? Relief? Compassion? Compassion for whom? Compassion, too, in the hand she put out to draw him down beside her.

"Shane, it's kind of you to want to spare me, but I can't be spared. You say you know . . . what I've got to tell you, but I'd never be *sure* you knew unless I told you myself. I can't be let off. I'd hate to think I'd got what I wanted by false pretences."

He said, very quietly: "Don't we know everything there is to know about each other? Must we put it into words?"

"I must . . . when I can find them."

"There are some things that should never be said."

"But this is not one of them. We can't begin on a lie—with something between us we're afraid to look at. We've spoiled so much. We can't risk spoiling what is left."

"Everything is left."

She shook her head.

"No, no. Don't let us pretend. We know that something important has gone, for both of us, that we've spoiled things. . . ." With a little gesture of despair she turned her dark gaze upon him. "Oh, Shane, why couldn't we wait? . . . How was it we didn't know?"

"I always knew," he said, "but it didn't help."

"It didn't save you from . . . Patricia?"

"Nor from Patricia's predecessor."

He heard her draw in her breath.

"Nothing saved me, either," she said, "from myself. It had to happen. Nothing *does* save us from ourselves, somehow. Garth never understood why I wouldn't marry him. I didn't understand, either, at first. I just knew I could do everything but that. . . . I had to be free. It wasn't that I didn't care for him, either." She stopped, realising that she was wrapping up her confession in words, leaving it on the threshold of his mind for him presently to pick up. Vehemently she stripped off its wrappings and thrust it starkly in front of him.

"Shane," she said, "it isn't a scrap of good if you don't understand what I'm talking about—if you don't understand that I was Garth Manistre's mistress. . . . Oh, I *knew* you wouldn't be able to bear it."

He crushed her up against him as that little hurt cry came from her. "No, no," he said. "It's hearing you put the thing into words! I can bear anything but that."

She sat silent, her face hidden against his coat, but her heart was crying, like a thing left out in the cold.

It wasn't too easy, explaining to Eve. And Eve wasn't too helpful. She didn't in the least see what Mona meant when she said, "Well, in a way, it was your own fault, darling. *You* asked Shane to come yesterday. If I'd gone on not seeing him it couldn't have happened." But at least she had gone on writing her letters—easier, certainly, to say things to the top of that bronze head. Then suddenly the bronze head was disconcertingly raised and its owner gazed very straightly at Mona over the tops of the spectacles which, to her annoyance, she now found it necessary to wear at her desk.

"Of course you won't announce the engagement yet awhile," she said. "Not before the end of the year."

Mona fought hard to meet that steady glance reinforced so tremendously by the steel rims of those absurd spectacles. "Anybody but mother would have gone in for pince-nez," she thought. Then she said: "We hadn't intended there to be any engagement. We just meant to get married."

"Very sensible. Then there isn't anything, at the moment, to discuss, it seems."

"Mother, we had meant to be married quite soon—as early as it could be arranged."

The old fastidious look passed over Eve's face. "My dear child!" she said. "Have you really forgotten that Garth has been dead scarcely three months?"

"But, mother, I didn't really love Garth. . . ."

"Love, if I may say so," observed Eve, "is a subject upon which you make rather frequent mistakes. Doesn't it occur to you that a year's careful thought may prevent you from making another?"

Mona smiled. "Shane and I have cared for each other since we were children, without realising it," she said. "You see, that's why we want to be married at once. We've wasted such a lot of time already. A year's an eternity. I don't see how we can wait as long as that. Darling, do be kinder. Don't insist on a year."

"I insist on nothing. You are over age and if you choose to walk out and be married to-morrow morning I could do nothing to prevent you. I am merely pointing out that there are certain common decencies in life that decent people respect. It seems a little strange that it should be necessary to point out such a fact to any daughter of mine."

"Mother, I *do* see all that. I know people will talk, and I know that Garth's mother will never forgive me. But then she won't forgive me however long I wait. . . ."

"It isn't a question of what other people find to say of you, but of what you may find to say of yourself."

Mona left that. She moved back slightly on her tracks.

"No number of years will make any difference to you, either, mother. I mean, you'll never like the idea of my marrying Shane. Well, *will* you? That D.S.O. you never expected Shane to get has wiped out a lot for you, I know—but it hasn't wiped out Patricia Ramsden."

Eve's pen had begun to scratch. She looked at it in that funny puzzled fashion people keep for offending nibs and unrecognised handwriting, gave it a little expostulatory rub on her blotter and seemed to be encouraging it to believe that it could do better. It couldn't. As Eve went on with her letter it continued to scratch most horribly.

"Oh, do get another nib, darling, that's perfectly beastly. And do answer. It is true, isn't it? That D.S.O. *hasn't* wiped Patricia out, has it?"

"I confess it has not," said Eve.

"But Patricia's finished, done with. . . . It's ages since Shane has seen her. She went back to her husband two years ago."

"Poor man, yes, so I understand," said Eve, changing her nib.

"Is it Patricia you don't trust—or Shane? I mean, do you think that she won't stick to her husband or that Shane won't stick to me?"

"Let us leave Miss Ramsden out of it."

"Well, then, Shane. Don't you trust Shane?"

"My dear child, do you trust him—*quite*—yourself?"

The colour flamed in Mona's face.

"Of course I trust him."

"You're quite sure of that?"

"Absolutely."

"Then why is it going to be so difficult to wait a year?"

"Mother, it's horrible you should believe *that's* the reason."

"Horrible? Merely natural. You use absurd words."

"But it *is* horrible. So horrible that I can't have you thinking it. I'll tell Shane we must wait, anyway, until Christmas. It sounds like a bit of my next life."

"Doesn't that strike you as a very stupid thing to say? Is your life really so empty? Are there no other interests—no other aims—no *work*?"

Mona got up from her chair and coming over to her mother's desk began doing idle things with the papers piled neatly there in a corner.

"For you sane people, yes. Lots of 'other' things. But some of us *aren't* sane—not very. We don't just take sex in our stride. If we don't get what we want there the rest doesn't really matter. We're made like that, some of us."

Eve said nothing. When the door had opened and closed and she was alone, she sat there with arrested pen, hearing quiet voices across the years. Her own: "But we *aren't* going to marry and have babies. Why can't we do something else?" And Beth's: "Because there isn't anything else worth doing."

It wasn't true. It couldn't possibly be true that Mona was really like Beth. No child of Eve's could possibly be like that: no child brought up as Mona had been. If you taught your children certain definite things, certain definite things happened. Eve really believed that. "All a matter of training!" Hadn't she always said it, acted upon it? Disturbing to believe that so sound a theory could, perhaps, for some reason or other, go wrong. . . .

Mona wrote to Shane:

I've promised mother that we won't even be engaged until the end of the year. She thinks it dreadful that I've got even within measuring distance of another "love affair" so soon. She doesn't understand and I can't explain. You see, I can't tell her about Garth and me—and you wouldn't believe how hard I've tried—and even if I could she wouldn't see how that would affect matters. She wouldn't see, I mean, that because I've belonged to Garth I can never be really happy or satisfied until I've belonged to you, that that, for me, is the only way of wiping Garth out for ever, poor boy. And she'd frown at that word "belong" and look so disgusted. Only I can't scratch it out. For me it doesn't mean any of the things she'd read into it.

Of course I see mother's arguments. So will you. That's the worst of us. We can always see why other people want to

do things or think we should want to do them. But even though I've promised I don't see how we can really wait a whole year. Do you?

Shane wrote that he didn't see either, that he didn't see how they could wait any time at all, nor why they should. Then he presented himself in person and said the same things much more emphatically. "I have promised nothing," he said, and refused to be bound by anything Mona had promised. Then she knew that he, too, was thinking of Garth Manistre, that he, too, saw only this way of wiping him out. "A year?" he said. "Why *anything* might happen in a year!" That utterly demolished her defences. "As though," she thought, "he doesn't trust *himself*!" She had no arguments to oppose against his suggestion that they should be married at once—and secretly. "Then nobody's sensibilities will be hurt!" he said. "Couldn't we square the old boy at Fiveways? If you gave out that you were staying there nobody'd see anything strange in that—you're so often there."

The "old boy" was delighted to be "squared." Shane's D.S.O. had done more for him in that quarter than in Eve's, after all, and, not only that, he did most thoroughly enjoy the little joke they were playing off upon Eve. That was what Jeremy called it and how he saw it.

But Mona was very far from seeing it like that. "Mother will just hate us," she said, "when she finds out."

Shane laughed. "Well, but there are so many other things she'd hate, come to that, if she knew about them. So what's the use of worrying?"

No use at all.

"Mother hasn't got the children she deserves," Mona said, and found some sort of consolation in putting it thus on to Fate.

CHAPTER TWO

H EAVEN alone knew what possessed them to go to Westmorland for their honeymoon. That wicked old man, Jeremy Bentley, had first suggested it at dinner one evening, a twinkle in his black, still roving eye; but even Jeremy had certainly not been prepared for that cool, "Why not?" of Shane's. And even while Mona turned her dark startled gaze upon him, he had gone on.

"Why not? I've never been there, and Mona's enthusiasm long ago fired my own. What about it, Mona?"

She continued to bend that dark scared gaze upon him, but she said nothing. Neither was her pale smile a very affirmative affair. Driven at last to speech by Jeremy's crazy chuckling, she said: "But won't it . . . I mean, shan't we find it full of sad . . . recollections?"

Shane had smiled at that.

"For you, or for me?" he asked.

She did not think he could be so cruel, had not struck this mood in him before, nor suspected it.

"For both of us," she said quietly. "Garth was your friend, as well as mine."

But Shane was not reproved.

"Ah, do you know," he said, "I'd almost forgotten that."

Out of his crazy outrageous chuckling Jeremy's aged voice came cloaked and muffled. Mona, hating him for the first time in her life, understood something of what her mother must have endured in those early days at Clunbury. He said things to hurt, because he wanted to see how the victim behaved. He was malicious and spiteful and malevolent, and

no adventure upon which one had sought his aid could surely come to success. Mona's heart sank within her. Of course, he did not *know* anything about her and Garth—save that they had been engaged. How should he? But yet there he was suggesting that he knew, or at least suspected, quite a lot. Actually, she knew, he did not suspect her of anything whatever, save of not knowing her own mind. He approved of her beauty too strongly to believe, even for a single moment, that she could have broken one of his most cherished canons of feminine behaviour. No, no, he wasn't trying to hurt *her*: he would not even see that he *was* hurting her. He only meant to take a dig at Shane . . . to remind the man in possession that there had been other claimants: that there had been one whose claims had even been partially recognised. He knew, none better, that no man ever wants to remember any such thing about his beloved.

"You, my dear," he was saying, "must know quite a lot about Westmorland. You went there so frequently and in such interesting circumstances. You must know Grasmere, for instance, very well!"

"Too well!" said Shane, and Jeremy's chuckles began anew.

Mona had not believed that anything so horrible could happen to her.

"Shane, I can't bear it, if we go to Westmorland," she moaned to him afterwards.

And Shane said, "You *will* bear it!"

He was holding her in his arms and she beat her hands frantically against his breast, as if she were in a cage and suffocating.

"You *will* bear it!" Shane said again, but this time his voice seemed to have nothing whatever to do with the words he uttered. It was inexpressibly gentle, like the touch of his hands on her arms.

"Why? Why? Why?" she moaned at him.

"Don't you *know*?"

Yes, she knew. He wanted the things of her Garth had had of her there . . . that night on Helvellyn, watching the

sunrise (that mad climb up from Wythburn in the soft darkness, with Garth catching her hand when she stumbled and pulling her up against him, as though getting to the top did not matter in the least, nor the sunrise . . .); the long hours in the sunlit valleys, the climbs up the fells and pikes; days and nights set to the melody of running water. She had to get Shane, too, mixed up with the scenery. And more than that—she had to get Garth disentangled from it.

"All right," she said, and then, "P'raps it isn't such a bad idea (such a *dreadful* idea, was the word in her mind) after all." To get Garth Manistre, she meant, stamped out as thoroughly as all that, right from the beginning. If he was not in Westmorland he would not, perhaps, be anywhere. . . . So Shane seemed to think. He had overlooked the studio, perhaps because Mona had said so little about it. Always it had been those visits to Ghyll House at Garth's leave time that had stuck in Shane's memory. Yet the studio was so obvious. And the things there were to know about it. Some time or other, they must occur to Shane. And when they did . . . but she shut her mind against that day when he should see the studio not as hers at all, but as hers and Garth's. She would say airily, "Yes, Garth designed it, of course. . . . Have you noticed the fire-place?" People always did.

"All right," she said again, "will you make the arrangements?"

But by then Shane had relented and would rather have gone anywhere than to Westmorland. Nevertheless, neither dared to draw back; so Mona had her shoes studded with iron nails and to Westmorland they went.

It was not a success. Verbally, they put it on to the weather which frowned on them with such dismal persistence that mountains and valleys alike were closed to them, and that poor ghost they had come to lay remained triumphant in his fastnesses among them. Here amid the old familiar scenes Mona found that scarcely anything really touched her, save the sight of Ghyll House turning blind eyes to the valleys and hills, displaying the legend "To Let, Furnished," its owners vanished—"gone abroad." And the edge of a bright red

cushion thrust back against one window, where they had forgotten to draw the blind quite low enough; that touched her, too. For she knew that cushion and the settee it rested upon and whose room it was that partially-drawn blind shrouded. . . . She hoped vaguely that somebody nice would take the house; somebody young and happy sit there in the window against the bright-red cushions and look out across the valley of Easedale. Yet she could not really believe that anybody, ever, would live there again. It was dead, like so much else; with its white paint, its white drawn blinds, it looked ghostly enough there on the lift of the valley, hung about with the mist of that perennial rain.

Only Ghyll House in the mist of rain. Nothing else of all the things they had come to find—and to lose—in Westmorland, save the sound of running water. That was with them day and night, until in terror they packed their belongings and ran away from it.

"I feel damp all through," Shane said that evening of the seventh day, as he stood at their bedroom window, watching Sour Milk Force come tumbling down the side of the valley. "What do you say to the Continent?"

They had been out that afternoon and got drenched, and tea was late. Mona sat shivering in her coat, waiting for the hastily-requisitioned fire to burn up and warm her, but some imp of mischief turned up the corners of her mouth as she looked at Shane's straight back and heard what he said.

"Why not?" she said. "Switzerland, perhaps. . . . More mountains. . . ."

Shane jumped round at that.

"You'd like to go to Switzerland?"

She moved her head slowly, not looking at him; holding out one foot to the feeble fire and still smiling.

"On the principle that what the scene of my . . . attachment . . . has failed to do for us, the scene of yours may perhaps accomplish?"

Then she looked up and her smiling vanished utterly, because Shane's face frightened her. But as she rose and went over to him, something else frightened her still more—the knowledge

that they had it in their power to hurt each other like this ; that there were going to be times when each would wield the dagger with as terrible and pitiless a pleasure as that with which she had just wielded it, for she had *enjoyed* saying what she had said. She knew that. And yet she had not said it deliberately. That was the really terrible thing—that these thoughts were there to come tearing out of her whether she would or not. Leaning there against him, her face close-pressed against his tweed coat, that smelt horribly because of the rain, she felt suddenly impotent and stunned.

"Oh, I didn't mean it," she sobbed. "I didn't mean it. I don't know why I say these things. . . ."

But Shane thought he knew very well. She said them on much the same principle as that upon which they had come to Westmorland—to show that they did not matter . . . that neither was afraid of them. But when she sobbed out on his breast, "It's spoilt . . . spoilt !" he was afraid of everything and so was she.

They went South the next day into Devon, which was new to both of them, guiltless of memories, clean stretches of open sky and earth and sea, mere landscape. Things were better there. And the things which weren't really better you somehow began to grow used to. You stopped feeling exasperated and irritated, because exasperation and irritability are such exhausting companions upon lengthy walks and because you remembered that this was a walk which would not end with Devon. The road went on and on, curving away into the distance. And of their own free will they had set their feet upon it. There was no going back. Yet how smooth the road had looked as they gazed down upon it from that ecstatic point where Shane had said, with the air of one solving a hitherto insoluble difficulty : "We'll get married secretly. . . ."

So, climbing the Devon hills, Mona learned to drop behind on a pretence of admiring the scenery, but in reality to give Shane an opportunity of going on and gaining the summit before her ; so that he might smile when she came up and say, "Hallo, tired, old lady ?" which she did not like in the least, because she was not tired, but which was better than

hearing Shane call out from the rear : " Hi, madam ! Do you *belong* to this party ? " or something equally sarcastic. She thought : " He can't even bear me to *walk* better than he does ! "

But in her heart she knew that was not the reason, but only that he wanted to shine at this business of tramping and climbing. He was not really competing with her at all, but with a ghost. Not for nothing had Garth Manistre boasted of his twenty-five miles a day.

There was another thing, too, that Mona saw. Shane wanted you to admit that he had an instinct for this business of out-of-doors, that compasses and charts and a topographical sense were all, if he chose, well within his grasp ; that he was not afraid to take short cuts, to adventure down unlikely-looking paths. To Mona, it was all very much like those youthful days when he had played cricket, just to show Mark that he could if he wanted to. At first, when she found a short-cut to somewhere, or away from somewhere, she was proud of it and claimed it afterwards as her trophy of the day, until she came to see that Shane said always upon such occasions, " I rather thought *I* found that, you know . . ." and when she pressed home her claim and petitioned for its recognition, she frequently felt as though some special allowance was being granted her, as though she'd been given something to which she was not really entitled. And presently she learned to smile and say, " It isn't worth arguing about, darling, is it ? Will you pass me the bread ? " It was not *only* that she sensed that atmosphere of competition : she knew that up to a certain point it was, quite simply, that she was learning " to put up " with things. That, indeed, came to be her acid test of love. If you really loved someone you " put up with things " . . . with all the little irritating personal idiosyncrasies you would never dream of enduring from anybody else. Because, when you had done " putting up " with them, something else remained—something fine and indestructible, something essential and precious. Nevertheless, there were times when a wistful memory climbed out of the past and looked at her. " Garth and Shane ! " she would think then,

“out of the two of them I could have made one really fine man . . . but the really fine man wouldn’t have wanted me and I wouldn’t have wanted him ! ”

So, even in those very early days, did she learn to smile a little at the more extravagant of her romantic illusions.

CHAPTER THREE

IT was the middle of March when Mona got back, via Surrey and Fiveways, to her mother's house in Bayswater. All the way up to Victoria she wondered how she was going to keep Devon and the March sea out of her conversation, and that still wonderful phrase "My husband." And then she saw that, for a time at least, it was going to be comparatively easy, because nobody was thinking of her, nor specially interested in her protracted stay in the country. Her mother said how much better she looked for the change, omitted to inquire after Grandfather Bentley, supposed that by now even *she* had had enough of the country, talked hard about something else for another five minutes and departed. Later, a newly-returned and much-decorated Maud Norman came in, with tickets for some lecture she was to give on Serbia and Russia, asked a lot of inconvenient questions about recent events at Fiveways, and likewise departed. At five, Judy came in with a silk jumper under her arm, which she proceeded to stitch with the air of one nobly performing a duty, yet scarcely sustained by the fact.

"Mother's been complaining about us to Aunt Maud," she said.

"Complaining? About us?"

"Yes. She says we're slack. She says here we are with every door open to us and we won't go in at any of them, and that she'd have given everything she possessed at our age (which I must say doesn't seem to have been much!) to have had even half our chances."

"Well, she's said that before," said Mona.

"But she's added such a lot to it this time. She doesn't draw

flattering pictures of *her* progeny, anyway. *You're* a dilettante, dabbling in art and love-affairs! Mark is just a nice boy who won't make the best of his opportunities (Mark *hates* his old shipping office, you know), and I'm a hard selfish young beast who takes everything for granted without ever stopping to count the cost to anybody. That's *Us*, according to mother!"

"Poor mother!" said Mona.

"Poor fiddlesticks!" said Judy. "We're not a bad lot, really, and, anyway, mother can't expect us to live up to her. It's too horribly strenuous. . . . Why won't this stitch lie flat do you imagine? Do you know, I don't think Providence intended me to sew."

Mona smiled.

"Do you know what Providence *did* intend you to do?"

"That's the trouble. You see, it's so difficult to decide. There's such a *lot* of life; tons of things I'd like to do. . . . Aunt Maud wants me to go round to the Clinic—that's an idea, rather. . . . It might help me to make up my mind."

"Do you think you'll be a doctor?"

"Don't know. I'd get fearfully tired of sick people, wouldn't I?"

"You can get fearfully tired of the other sort, too, you know."

"Lord, yes, can't you *just*!" Judy smoothed the jumper with impatient fingers. "I think I'd rather be a surgeon. I'd rather perform on a nice clean *prepared* patient and then go away and leave somebody else to clear up the bloody mess. Anyway, I've got to make up my mind soon, because it's so awful trying to live on that five bob a week mother allows me, and she won't let me touch that money father left for me—says he meant it to be used for some definite professional training. Of course, there's always the old boy at Fiveways, but I don't really *like* asking him for money and he doesn't really like giving it to me. He doesn't approve of me, much, you know, and I'm sure I don't approve of him, the old tyrant."

"You might get married, you know," Mona said.

"Not I," said Judy. "I'm not the marrying sort, thanks very much."

"Is there one?"

"Rather! The sort that can put up with things."

Mona stared at her. The wisdom of this child! The way she stumbled on facts, on truths you had learned so painfully. Was it because she looked at people so hard, because looking at people really hard did not hurt her, that she saw so much?

"You see," Judy went on. "I *can't* 'put up' with things. I should begin to throw the furniture about. I find men so aggravating, even the nice ones. I couldn't bear to live in the same house with a man. Fancy me in a house all day with a man and babies. I'd go stark staring raving mad. . . . Marriage is so *messy* on anything under a quarter of a million a year. *Why* do people get married? So many of 'em?"

"Do you mean why do men marry women?"

"No, I meant why do women marry men? *Why*, for instance, did grandmother Bentley ever marry Grandfather Bentley?"

"Well, if it comes to that, why did grandfather Bentley ever marry grandmother?"

"Oh, that's simple. Malleable material, darling . . . something he could bend—something soft he could write his name on! That's what old Jeremy Bentley was after. And sons!"

"He didn't get them," said Mona.

"It wouldn't have made any difference if he had!"

"It might have—to Grandmother Bentley."

"You mean he'd have treated her better—not gone about after other women? Good lord! Hadn't she a right to be treated well, for *herself*? I tell you what. Men have been so busy dividing the world up into Male and Female that they've about forgotten we're all human beings. That's what I complain about. If ever I find a man who'll recognise that my human rights are as many and as important as his, I'll consider the question of marriage again. Till then, *Me* for a career."

Mona laughed. "By the way, Judy," she said, "Shane is coming to dinner to-night. I forgot to tell mother."

"Well, he hasn't lost much time," said Judy. "He hasn't been near us since the day you went away."

"He's been awfully busy finishing the new book."

"Not too busy, I bet, to run down to Fiveways."

"I suppose we have been seeing rather a lot of each other," Mona parried. "Did *mother* notice that, too? That Shane didn't come here, I mean, while I was away."

"She never mentioned it, anyway. Mother's given us up, you know. There are the usual hundred odd things or so crowding us out. Just as well, else we'd lead a miserable existence!"

Careers for mothers? Oh, most certainly. They both smiled over the recollection of that phrase of their childhood.

"Living with mother," said Judy, "is rather like existence in an army squad drilled by an unpopular sergeant. All you want is not to be noticed. Not, of course, that I mean *mother* is unpopular, but you do hope she won't *notice* you too much. Personally, I've always been awfully glad mother spreads herself so much. I believe there never has been a time when I haven't thanked God on my knees that there have always been so many 'other things,' distracting a little of her attention from us."

The "other things" of the moment were unduly pressing. Every society in which Eve held office seemed to be calling Committee Meetings or demanding Secretary's reports, and, in addition, it had become apparent that one of Eve's itinerant domestics (Judy's name for the girls and women who had held sway in the kitchen since Martha's enforced departure at seventy) was going to have a baby.

Eve certainly took a good deal of trouble over Minnie, for all she disapproved so strongly of Minnie's attitude on the whole affair. When her parents proved implacable and Maud Norman insisted that she ought not to be "running up and down Eve's stairs," she exerted herself to find a place in the country where she might be looked after, and went out and bought her a wedding-ring to keep her in countenance.

Mona and Judy were lost in admiration.

"Any other woman would have packed her off to some Home or other for Fallen Women," said Judy.

"A Home for the Victims of Fallen Men," said Mona. "Isn't that what she would call it?"

But Minnie steadfastly refused to be regarded as a victim. "Tom was going to the Front again, and we was fond of one another," she said. "I don't know how it was, but I sort of *felt* I shouldn't see him again. What I done I done willin' . . ."

"Well, she *won't* see him again," Mona said to her mother (for Minnie's Tom had fallen, like Garth, in those last hours of warfare). "Darling, can't you really understand what she means?"

"I understand that she is very wrong-headed and perverse," Eve said, and when Minnie went down into the country, refused to give Mona her address.

"I will not dream of allowing you to go and encourage Minnie in her anti-social attitude," she said. "Society must be protected. I believe, of course, that this war-baby scare has been very much exaggerated, but young women cannot be encouraged to think that they've a right to add to the illegitimate population as they think fit. I can't imagine why you are so anxious to defend her."

"Darling, I'm *not* 'defending' her; I'm trying to understand her. . . . You see, I *can* understand why she did it. But I'm ready to admit that it was careless of her to have a baby. I agree with you that children require two parents!"

"Careless! My dear child! A woman who can't control herself can't hope to control her children."

"Uncontrolled!" "Unbalanced!" *Of course* that was how her mother would see this thing. Mona frowned.

"But, darling, suppose there hadn't been any baby?"

Eve, however, steadfastly refused to suppose any such thing. Nor did she see, she said, that any such supposition made Minnie's case any better. "Men and women are not animals," she said, "and must learn to keep sex in its proper place."

Mona made no reply and the conversation flagged. She just sat there at the window looking down the quiet street, her hands idle in her lap. "I can't understand how she can sit there doing absolutely nothing," Eve thought, feeling aggravated and yet vaguely disturbed, not only because that month in the country seemed to have brought so little colour

into Mona's pale face, but because of that something shy and fugitive about this daughter of hers that so constantly balked her and consorted so ill with that other air of worldly wisdom which, to Eve's way of thinking, she brought to bear on too many of the problems of life. There were times, Eve thought, when this elder daughter of hers seemed to have no standards at all about the things that mattered, "or is it that she's like her father, everlastingly finding excuses for people?—what Martha used to call 'so shocking tolerable.' " But she backed speedily away from that, as though she remembered suddenly things she thought she had forgotten. She would never admit that gaps ever appeared in that marvellous armour of self-sufficiency she had worn for so long, nor that the wound it covered was still capable of bleeding. She *had* forgotten. *This* was her life, this thing the Present, alive with work and aspiration. The Past did not matter.

"It's such a nice day," she said to that quiet figure in the window. (What *did* she find to sit like that and brood about—a young girl like that?) "Don't you think we might go out for a walk? You can come and help me choose that gown for Minnie's baby."

Mona turned her head and her face lighted up. Choosing clothes for somebody not yet here. . . . "I'd love to," she said, and went off to get her hat on.

They chose the gown, which was a good deal more expensive than Eve had intended it to be, because Mona said, "Oh, *that* one, darling, we *must* have that one," so fervently, that the girl in the shop thought Mona was buying it for a baby of her own.

And Mona did not blush, which Eve thought immensely clever of her. Mona was never *gauche*; she could carry off any situation. For so young a girl, her self-possession was remarkable.

"Oh, dear me, no," Eve said in her brisk, common-sense tones, "my daughter is not even married yet."

Mona smiled.

"Let's go and have some tea," she said. "There's a new place Shane and I have discovered. . . ."

Then there was Mark. Mark, too, at the moment, came under that heading of 'other' things, diverting Eve's attention from her eldest daughter. It was on the Saturday afternoon, three days after her arrival home that Mona discovered that. Somebody had wanted Mark on the telephone, and Eve had come hurriedly down the garden path and put her head in at the studio door.

"Are you harbouring Mark?" she said, "or do you know where he is?"

Mona was mixing clay before the roughed-up outline of the head of Shane on which she had been busy since her return. She did not look at her mother as she answered, but pushed the head round on its stand and frowned at it.

"Mark's gone to Kew," she said. "With Greta and Michael."

"To Kew? With Greta?"

"And Michael. To see the azaleas and rhododendrons. Didn't he tell you?"

"No," said Eve, and went away again to inform somebody on the telephone that Mark was not in. When she came back Mona had finished with her clay, and was doing something to a little water-colour sketch of a gigantic tree, whose gnarled and twisted trunk stuck out of a yellow sandy bank on which were growing sparsely pink and mauve wild-flowers and a flowering hedge of elder bushes. The sun was catching the yellow sand and filling the whole picture with warmth and colour, and Mona sat before it quietly painting in more pink and mauve flowers.

"Can you spare me a minute?" asked Eve.

"Fifty, darling, if you like. Come in and sit down. . . . No, of course you won't interrupt. I'm only touching this thing up. Rather nice, isn't it? Almost good enough for some of the summer exhibitions."

"Then why not send it in?"

"Because I promised it to Uncle Joe for his birthday and that comes slap bang in the middle of the summer exhibitions."

"Couldn't you have sent him something else?"

"He won't want anything else. He just took a fancy to this

when I was doing it last summer. Did you recognise it for a bit of Lincolnshire? Out towards the coast."

"I must say it seems a pity to send a thing like that to hang in a farmer's house where no one will ever see it, when you might show it and perhaps sell it," said Eve. "But I know it won't be of any use telling you that."

Mona smiled.

"Why don't you find a cushion? That chair's hard, and you're in an awful draught."

Eve, however, who did not care for cushions and never recognised draughts, stayed where she was. And suddenly she said what she had come to say. "Mona, has it occurred to you that Mark and Greta are seeing rather a lot of each other?"

"Yes," said Mona.

"Did you know he was going to Kew?"

"No, the loquacious Michael told me. But Mark frequently goes to Kew. As a matter of fact, Mark at Kew is quite a revelation. The gardeners think him frightfully intelligent!"

"But why with Greta?"

"*And* Michael, darling."

"There can't be anything in Greta to attract Mark, except her pretty face, even if Greta were free," Eve said.

"I don't agree with you. There's a lot of Shaw's Ann Whitefield in Greta, you know, mother. She's clever."

"Oh, *that* sort of cleverness," said Eve, in the tone of one who didn't recognise it.

"Well, it's the sort Mark likes, anyway. Mark sees a lot in Greta. Not the things that Tanner saw in Ann, maybe, though they're there, most of them, all the same. But Mark isn't as clever as Tanner. Besides, he'd hate to see anybody as clearly as all that—especially a woman. It'll be quite enough when he see's that she's a nice thoroughly feminine thing with thoroughly feminine ambitions (oh, we don't acknowledge the distinction, but Mark does!) That's the sort of woman Mark likes. He can't *bear* women who 'do' things, or, worse, *want* to do them. Mark's the cave-man grown monogamous and gentle. Fact darling."

Eve said, "Nonsense," rather hopefully, and then, much

more hopefully : " And in any case, Greta isn't free. Mardinor won't budge."

" I know," said Mona, painting mauve flowers thoughtfully, " I doubt if Mark's cave-man enough for that. Somehow, I don't see Mark running off with somebody else's wife, do you ? "

" Good gracious, no," said Mark's mother, and then, wistfully, " I do wish Mark were a little more interested in his work. . . ."

So did Mona perceive that her brother had been added to the already considerable list of " other things " which stood in the way of Eve's taking any undue interest just then in her affairs. She did not even notice the number of odd days and week-ends Mona spent at Fiveways, nor that Shane's non-appearances at Marne House always coincided with them.

" At this rate," Mona said to Shane, " we might go on for years without her guessing."

Then suddenly it became evident that they were not going on for years, for Mona was aware that she was about to have a baby.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVE, not given to labouring the obvious, said extremely little. But what she did say was to the point. Married people should certainly live together, and therefore, until Shane and Mona could find a home of their own, Shane and Mona must come to Marne House. But to Jeremy Bentley she said, by letter, a good deal more than that.

It was June. In the next door garden, an elder bush, heavy with flower, leaned over the fence and in the lightest of breezes tapped with creamy fingers at the studio window: "You'd think somebody was outside trying to get in," said Shane, and one day got up, opened the window and pushed back the leaning branches. The next morning Mona went into the studio early, opened the window and clipped every one of those creamy tapping fingers. When Shane came down later they looked at him reproachfully from out the iridescent vase Mona had found for them. Neither mentioned them. But later Greta Mardinor, putting her head in at the studio door on the way up to the house, said, "Oh, you've cut the elder bush! *Why?*"

"Too ghostly!" said Shane. "The dead hand!"

Greta laughed and went on up to the house.

"Isn't she here rather a lot?" Shane asked, when she had gone. "Do you think your mother realises?"

"She'd realise it more if we didn't give her so much extra to do," Mona said, for Shane was seeing his new book through the press and had not too much time to go looking for houses. So Eve went looking for them instead—an arrangement which worked very well, until it transpired that all the houses Eve

contrived to discover were not the sort of houses that Shane could afford to consider. It was distinctly a shock to Eve to learn that Shane was making no more than two hundred a year by his pen, and that the Industrials in which his tiny capital was tied up under his mother's will, now added to that amount by no more than eighty pounds a year. Shane's hopes, it transpired, were entirely in the success of his new book, *The Journal of Henry Houghton*, to appear in the September, and what Eve said of that, too, was brief but to the point. "Let us hope it will sell more than the four hundred copies of *Mirage*." It was obvious that she thought, but was strenuously refraining from saying, that she considered it was time Shane turned his attention to the really serious business of earning his living.

The Journal of Henry Houghton appeared in the September, received an excellent Press and sold three thousand copies in three months, which everybody seemed to think really excellent save Eve and Shane. Shane was bitterly disappointed, and Eve said to Mona: "My dear child, it's absurd. You can't live on *that*. Shane ought to be encouraged to think about a change of occupation. I've no doubt, if necessary, Mark could do something for him at the office."

Mona smiled at that.

"The trouble is," she said, "that I doubt if Shane could do anything at the office for himself."

But she counselled Shane to take the flat her mother had unearthed in a north-west suburb and encouraged her grandfather to furnish it for them (complete with baby-grand in the drawing-room) as his wedding present, and could not understand why her mother disapproved of the hundred a year the old man wrote offering to allow her, nor why Shane so strenuously backed Eve's arguments upon this occasion. Mona had no strong feelings, either way, about money. She could not see why people grew so stiff, so dignified, frequently so offended about it. People *minded* about money more than they minded about anything else. Why should she mind taking money from her grandfather, who had a good deal more than

he was likely to spend even if he lived to be a hundred, as people declared he would? It would be different, Shane explained, impatient that she could not or would not see anything so obvious, if he were earning a regular and adequate income.

"But then I shouldn't *want* the money," Mona said, "there's no sense in having more money than you need." And she, too, was a little impatient because Shane used to be as casual about money as she, and she resented the fact that marriage should have made it possible for them to have even the slightest of differences over so silly a topic. But Eve, who had lived long enough to know that money in this world is at least a good deal more important than Mona imagined it, watched her settling down to marriage on a precarious income of three hundred a year or thereabouts, with feelings of acute perturbation not unmixed with that old sense of frustration and disappointment. Somehow, it never failed to seem incongruous that *this* should have happened to Mona, who had surely been marked out for success in a way few girls of her station could ever have been.

Nevertheless, for those first few months even Eve would not have denied that the tiny flat, for which grandfather Bentley's money had done so much, harboured nothing whatever but happiness—and this despite the fact that the spectacle of a domestic, dinner-cooking Mona was by no means a pleasing one to an Eve who had no opinion of "domestic drudgery" and believed that all women who could should escape it. Continually in rebellion against the houses men build for women, she saw a good deal of this drudgery as completely unnecessary, and on the public platform had already delivered herself of some trenchant remarks upon a subject dear to her heart; yet here was Mona taking the inconveniences of her tiny non-self-contained flat as though she did not realise they were there—as she probably did not. Nevertheless, it was a little difficult to see how a thing which left her so tranquil and content and sent her to the work of the studio with so keen a zest could really be the deadly thing of drudgery to her that it certainly would have been to her mother.

Neither could it be denied that Mona's interest in what Eve called her "own work" was sharper and more concentrated than it had ever been before, so that in those few months before her son was born, Mona worked for some part of almost every day in the studio at the bottom of the garden on the finishing of the bust of Shane that she wanted to have ready for the winter or early spring exhibitions. By the time the journey from Kensal Rise to Bayswater became something of a drag, the head was almost finished, and Shane was suggesting that perhaps, now, she might finish it "at home."

For a second Mona had stared at him, suspecting that at long last he had noticed some at least of the things there were to notice about the studio, but she saw that nothing of the sort had happened (and, of course, it never *would* happen now; they had "got over" *that*!) but merely that Shane hated sharing her with the family and resented her mother's so obvious intention to take the bother of an evening meal off her hands by seeing that she shared the meal prepared at Marne House and sending her home with nothing to do but go straight to bed.

"You know, darling, we might just as well not have a home of our own for the little we're in it!" Shane grumbled on the way home one evening. "Of course, I don't grudge you the time for the sittings, but we add on nearly a couple of hours for travelling backwards and forwards and another couple for family intercourse. It means that in the evenings, nowadays, I scarcely ever work at all. And, darling, I have *got* to work, haven't I?"

She pressed his arm to her side.

"Of course you have, darling."

"And you don't think I'm a horrid selfish male just grumbling?"

"Not a *horrid* selfish male, anyway."

"And it is true, isn't it, that if I don't work we don't get any money?"

"I suppose it is, darling."

"And that if we don't get any money, we don't get anything to eat, isn't it?"

"I don't know about that. I shouldn't be willing to starve as easily as that. I could teach . . . have pupils at home . . . I did, once. Lettering pupils."

"Lettering pupils be damned!" said Shane. "Haven't you got enough to do *now*? Do you think I *like* having my wife cook my dinners and make my bed . . ."

"My bed, too, darling," said Mona, in the gentle insinuating fashion of one who would not unduly press a claim.

Shane laughed, and there for the moment the matter dropped. It was Mona herself who picked it up again two days later, as she stood looking from door to door of the flat and up the funny little staircase that led to the attic Shane called his study.

"You know, Shane," she said, "I don't *really* see where I could put it."

"Put what?"

"You, darling: you in plaster. There just isn't anywhere at all."

Shane looked about encouragingly in unlikely places and agreed that there just was not "anywhere at all."

"And if there were, what about the light?" he asked.

"Bad, of course, except in the attic, and you know you couldn't bear to have me there."

"We needn't work at the same time."

"But suppose we wanted to? Besides, I should make a horrid mess and spoil your beautiful new carpet."

"Grandpapa Bentley's beautiful new carpet," said Shane.

"Rubbish. . . . How *can* you be so feeble! When is a wedding-present not a wedding-present?"

"When there's too much of it, old girl. Anyway, I give you *carte blanche* to spoil the carpet."

"No thanks," said Mona. "I'm sure you can manage to squeeze in the other few sittings I want—there won't be many of them. You see, I do feel that the flat does *not* want you in plaster and if we try to impose you upon it the taxi-man'd smash into something getting here, or you'd fall over with yourself coming up the steps. . . ."

Thus did they recognise that the flat was not big enough for

the ordinary purposes of life and for Shane's work and Mona's as well. So Mona continued to go to Bayswater until the end of October, when the head went to the caster's and Bayswater came to Mona.

With the birth of Richard Frank, at the beginning of December, that little fact concerning the size of the flat was re-established and emphasised, together with the additional facts that a flat was by no means the best accommodation for a baby; that the baby, being delicate was also distinctly fretful, and that its fretfulness disturbed his father at his work to such an extent that the family exchequer fell during the first three months of his existence in a way that caused Mona to suggest presently that Shane should go down each morning to the studio in Bayswater, as other men went down to their offices, an offer which Shane, a little disgusted with himself, accepted with alacrity.

"And you can tell me what the head looks like in bronze," Mona said to Shane, "and if it's going to be good enough for any exhibition anywhere." The head had long been home from the foundry, but Mona had not yet had time to go and look at it.

Frankly, there was not any time for anybody or anything, save Richard Frank, who cared for nobody but his mother and screamed at all her self-constituted deputies. And again, for Eve, the cracks revealed themselves in that armour-plate of hers, so that she saw herself, all those years ago, slipping at nights into a dressing-gown and out into Monica's nursery and remembered a voice, quiet these many years, that had said, "If you left that woman to do the job you pay her to do the child would get used to her."

But, in any case, for Mona there was no paid woman: neither would she hear of anybody seeing to it that there was—and for reasons quite other than Shane's, which, of course, turned on the everlasting principle that you do not take monetary gifts from anybody. Mona's reason was expressed, quite simply, to Eve. "I'm his mother. I'm responsible for him. If he's delicate and peevish, I'm responsible for that, too, somehow. I haven't any right, even if I could afford it, to

push him and his peevishness on to some other woman. It isn't any good to talk about my work, he *is* my work, at the moment. I knew what I was doing. I needn't have had him. I *wanted* him."

Even Eve did not know the answer to this, and wise in her generation, she did not attempt any; but she suspected that Shane—leaner than ever, these days, and already beginning to look harassed and a little weary—had less level-headedness than Mona to bring to the trials of existence *à trois* (surely more numerous and more severe for her, however, than for him?) Yet about Mona there was certainly something that was missing about Shane—that indefinable suggestion of one secretly and deeply satisfied, as though she drew upon some living well of strength within herself. Looking at Mona you knew that having put her hand to the plough she would not look back, however long and heavy-going the furrow, however hotly the sun beat down upon her head. But about Shane you did not know that: indeed, Eve suspected that already Shane was looking if not back, then around. The long and heavy furrow did not appeal to him any more than it had ever appealed to Eve, who sympathised with such statements of his feelings as he put into words and agreed that the *Journal of Henry Houghton* deserved a better fate than the reading public had so far accorded it; even on a question of reviews alone, she thought, it should have done better.

"Reviews don't sell books," said Shane, "it's talk . . . about you, about your book. It's knowing the right people and being able to entertain them. . . . I can't afford to follow up my acquaintances. The powerful can't be asked to drop into tea at Kensal Rise. . . . Money? Of *course* money matters. Mona just doesn't know what she's talking about."

"America," said Eve brightly. "Isn't America going to do something for you?" She thought America was over-kind to British writers . . . "as though they hadn't any of their own."

"I haven't reached America," Shane said bitterly. "*Mirage* was never given a chance—wouldn't be, of course, on its miserable sale here; *The Journal* hasn't found a publisher

there yet. It counts as a first novel there, of course, and nobody jumps at first novels, unless they've been howling successes on this side. Even publishers have to live, I suppose. So that's that."

It did seem to be, certainly.

So Shane went on with his journalism: it was weeks since he had touched the new book. He simply could not afford to write novels.

But neither, he was aware, did he at that period want very much to write them. He was abashed because the event to which he had looked forward, which he had most fervently desired, should have had so devastating an effect upon him. For he made no secret of it to himself—he was bitterly disappointed with his performance in the rôle of father. He did not feel affection of any sort for this tiny atom of humanity who had arrived to shatter his peace and induce in Mona's eyes that look of abstracted anxiety which he could not bear to see. He hated what he called the spider quality in women which made so many of them transfer their affection from their husbands to their children. He did not really believe this was true of Mona, for he did not find it as easy as all that to efface himself. In his soberer moments he saw that it was only that Mona's wakeful nights and anxious harassed days were wearing her out, so that all physical desire was stifled within her, like the desire for books, for her work, for everything that did not just minister to Richard Frank's well-being.

"I can't help it, darling. I can't help it," she said to Shane. "I simply *can't* do everything, I'm not Amazon enough. The other things must wait until Dickie becomes a little more reconciled to life, or somebody in America discovers how good *The Journal* is."

But sometimes, as Shane looked at her white and weary face, he hated himself for marrying her, for bringing her to this: but worse than that, there were times when, even more, he hated her for marrying him.

It was some consolation when Burlington House accepted and placed Mona's bust of Shane. Burlington House was a

good selling medium, Shane declared hopefully, but Mona only stared at him.

"Sell it? Of course I can't sell it," she said. "How *could* I?"

"But we need the money, darling."

"I can't help it," Mona said stubbornly, "I can't part with it. I did it for *Us*! Besides, people *don't* buy portraits."

"But if you had a buyer for this you could offer to have another cast taken. . . ."

"I'd hate doing even that," said Mona.

"Oh, my dear girl, hang it *all*!"

Mona flushed.

"I get tired of setting all our life to the tune of £. s. d.," she said.

"But this isn't a question of £. s. d. *only*," Shane told her. "Can't you see how useful it would be to get bought by the right people . . . someone really interested, in whose house it would be seen. . . . It would do you no end of good."

The fretted string of Mona's endurance snapped suddenly.

"And you!" she said. "You haven't forgotten that! Head of the novelist, Shane Mostyn, by his wife, Monica. . . ."

"What's the matter with you?" said Shane, "one simply can't *speak* to you!"

Mona said nothing and her white shadowed face lashed Shane into sudden fury.

"You made a mistake," he said bitterly. "You should have married Manistre. . . . He'd have left you well off, and if you'd unwisely consoled yourself with me. . . ."

The rest of his sentence fell on unheeding ears. She heard nothing but that first phrase, "You made a mistake in not marrying Manistre. . . ." It was not what he said: it was where he put the accent. He did not do it deliberately: it was not a conscious gibe. She wished it had been. He had said it so naturally . . . "You made a mistake . . . you should have *married* Manistre. . . ."

He said it so naturally, so simply. That was what she could not bear. The door opened and shut. Mona was gone.

Five minutes later, Shane found her engaged on one of her

perennial tasks for her small son. He choked down the irrational, puerile resentment which arose within him at the sight and came to put his hands on her shoulders, leaning his head down to hers bowed low over the child in her arms.

"My dear, what is it?" he said. "What is the matter with us?"

She reached a hand up to his on her shoulder, but said nothing.

"It's this damned lack of money . . . I've spoilt things for you: hemmed in your life. You endure it and your nerves suffer. You jump at me for trifles. Or I jump at you. Why do you have so much less patience with me than with Dickie?"

She said: "Dickie? Dickie is so helpless. You couldn't be cross with anything so tiny and helpless."

"Yet he is the cause of all our troubles."

She turned her head to him at that; the lifted line of her profile hurt him with its beauty. And that straight dark look of hers from out the widely-set eyes hurt him, too.

"*Dickie?* The cause of all our troubles? Oh, Shane! How *can* you! We wanted him so. . . ."

"But we couldn't afford him. . . . He was just that 'little more' . . . I oughtn't to have let you have him!"

He saw her fold her arms around the sleeping child with a gesture so instinctive, so all-embracing that again there swept over him that irrational sense of resentment, of neglect.

"There is a class of society," he said bitterly, "that cannot afford to have the common human experiences—and we belong to it. You didn't know that, but I did: so the blame is mine. Things weren't like this before. I ought to have *known*."

He moved away from her, crossed the room and stood looking down at the empty grate. It was a long while before either spoke, and then it was Mona—in that low voice that since Dickie's arrival had become natural to her, as though always she feared that she might wake him.

"We're not in want," she said. "People bring up several children on less than you have earned this year!"

"And the wives," said Shane, "are beasts of burden. Can't

you understand it enrages me, drives me mad to see you looking fagged and washed out, always tired, frequently nervy and out of patience? I want you fine and rare and beautiful in surroundings worthy of you. Oh, I don't want you to wallow in wealth . . . but I can't bear the spectacle of the fine edge of you being gradually worn down."

Mona went on rocking her child in her arms: her long dark gaze rested on him wistfully and ever so faintly her mouth smiled.

"There is something the matter with *us*," she said, "if we can't . . . be happy together as we are. Money wouldn't make any difference."

He came over and kissed her wistful lips.

"*Wouldn't it?*" he said. "Don't you believe it! We'd be as happy as sand-boys with another four hundred a year."

"Dickie's asleep," she said. "Are you going to work while I get dinner?"

"Oh, God!" he growled. "Why can't we turn a handle and haul the meals up from some invisible kitchen, all ready to eat? *Must* you stew in that kitchen? Can't we go out?"

"It's one hundred and fifty per cent dearer to go out—even if we could leave Dickie. . . . But I shan't 'stew' much. The weather's so hot I thought the dinner might be cold."

"It's eight months since we dined out anywhere, except at Marne House," Shane grumbled.

She remembered it . . . that little dinner in Soho, just a week before that awful day and night when Richard came. Did he think she had forgotten it? Well, if there had been no dining-out, there had been other things, infinitely more precious. Why did Shane pretend there had not? Why did he try to make her believe they had secured nothing worth while, that their marriage had merely soiled and dimmed her? She was nothing of the sort. But these unexpectedly hot days were trying. They kept her from recovering her strength as they kept Dickie fractious and white. She was always tired, her head frequently ached and her wakeful nights left her a prey to nerves during the day—and not to her own nerves

alone. Shane had nerves, too. . . . She just could not bear it when he suggested that their marriage was not a success; that there was any single thing in it to regret, that in some way or other this beautiful exquisite affection of theirs had got spoiled.

She could not bear it very much better when other people came suggesting it, when her mother said, "My dear *child*, how tired and worn-out you look! This life is killing you!" nor when Judy came and swung her long legs from Mona's gate-leg table, and indicated that she thought they had been "rather assish" to "introduce our young friend upon the scene."

"To tell you the truth, Mo," she said, "I never *can* understand why people want to duplicate themselves so frequently. You know what mother says—that if we could only keep the population stationary for two years. . . ."

"Among the poor," said Mona's scornful voice. "Oh, it's common sense, but it isn't justice."

"Oh, if you feel like that about it," said Judy. "But it amuses me to work out *why* some people thought the world would be improved by four or five of *them*. It's a queer sort of conceit, I suppose. Why do you suppose mother ever had Us? We've been a horrid handicap. She'd have done lots better without us, anyway. Why didn't she cut us out and get on with things?"

"Mother *doesn't* cut out things, you know," Mona said. "She'd want to do everything. She's out to *prove* that women can do everything—marriage, babies, career and all. If they *want to*."

"But all women don't want to. Some of us aren't a bit good at the feminine things. We *can't* be, or else why are there so many women who're such horrible failures as wives and mothers? Beastly incompetents!"

"They'd probably have been as incompetent at anything else."

"Not all of 'em. That's mother's argument, but I don't agree with it. Look at that girl Gray we used to know, Chrissie Gray. She's *awful* as a housekeeper, but she was a crack

reporter before she married. You remember Shane saying they said in Fleet Street she could get a story 'as good as any man's.' Chrissie, of course, had babies . . . that properly put the lid on Chrissie's reporting. And that girl Myers who took up accounting and got the push when she married. Well, *she* can't cook a rice pudding. Fact. But why on earth *should* she cook rice puddings? Why should anybody *expect* her to? Because she's a woman. If a man doesn't like gardening, or fret-work, or motor-cycling, nobody expects him to do it just because other men do. Nobody even thinks it frightfully unnatural if a man doesn't take a wife and beget children. But if you're a woman. . . ."

She paused for a reply, but as none seemed to be forthcoming, dashed on.

"Crowds of women doing the wife and mother stunt'ud be lots happier learning to bind books or assess rates, or to pull out teeth. I don't feel any bloomin' Pooh Bah of the feminine attributes myself, to tell you the honest. And look at you! You can't tell me you *like* doing all these dull domestic things. It wouldn't be so bad if you had a girl to look after Dickie: but every day, all the time and all the time . . . I can't think how you do it. . . . If I were you, I'd have had one good messy five minutes with a razor and hooked it by now. What do you get *out* of it, Mo, anyway?"

"You wouldn't understand, if I told you," Mona said, and Judy seemed to think that extremely probable.

Judy went on talking. Even Richard Frank seemed to find her exhilarating. He lay in his mother's arms with his eyes fixed upon Judy's face, and when she noticed it and distorted her features for his further delectation, he acknowledged the effort with the faintest of smiles.

"I didn't know they did—at that age," said Judy.

"Smile? I don't believe they do, either, as a rule," Mona said, investing Richard Frank with all the importance of being a pleasing exception to the rule.

"Why don't you come oftener?" Shane said to Judy, when he came in. "I never remember such a quiet afternoon for months."

Judy hated him for that. Really, men were beasts, even the nice ones, like Shane. "I can't *think* what Mo gets out of it . . ." she thought, her eyes on her sister's face. "No, you stay where you are," she said, "I'll collect the grub."

When she came back with it, an ecstatic-faced Mona urged her to congratulate Shane immediately. "His agents have had an offer for the publication of *The Journal* in America!"

"Good biz," said Judy. "Good terms?"

"Good enough," said Shane, "but I'd have accepted them whatever they were."

The ecstasy went out suddenly from Mona's face. It had again that shadowy exhausted look which had been there when Judy came in, that had gone as they sat there talking, that had come back again when Shane had said that about the quiet afternoon. And Judy thought again: "What *does* she get out of it, I wonder?"

"Written any new songs lately?" she asked Shane.

Her brother-in-law smiled.

"His lordship has no feeling whatever for the Arts," he said. "He cares nothing about the production of literature and objects to all music except his own."

And Shane laughed.

Mona said indifferently, "Judy, do have some more tea," but under her thin frock her shoulders (surely they were thin, too?) moved in the faintest of faint shrugs, and when she looked at Shane, Judy found it impossible to interpret that interchange of glances. Was she angry, or sorry—and if sorry, was it for herself or for him?

"*Men!*" thought Judy, "they're all alike!" What she meant was: "*Husbands* are all alike. . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE *Journal of Henry Houghton* appeared in America towards the end of September, and by Christmas its extraordinary and unexpected success was assured. Cables, letters, newspaper-cuttings, all poured into the little Kensal Rise flat, assuring Shane of that most blessed and acceptable fact.

"Fourth large printing in three months," advertised Shane's publishers. "Not for years has a book aroused so much discussion." America, it seemed, was really interested in this novel of an unknown writer. "A book of real substance and merit, that can be especially recommended to the intelligent American woman," one reviewer said of it, and even cast doubts upon the reputed sex of Shane Mostyn, since, despite the masculinity of the title, *The Journal of Henry Houghton* was a very careful feminine study. In New York sermons were being preached upon it, or against it; women's clubs were debating its thesis ("Didn't know there *was* one," growled Shane)—and, altogether, it certainly appeared that if you lived in America and had not read *The Journal of Henry Houghton*, you were hopelessly out of all the book discussions of the season. . . .

When Shane had recovered, an intensely practical mood descended upon him, which speedily turned Mona out of the Kensal Rise flat and established her in a house ("as much too large as the flat was too small") in Bayswater, which proved to Mona that the mood was not quite so intensely practical as Shane imagined. Practical enough, however, to withstand her plea for a house in the country rather than in town. Shane, it seemed, was not willing to bury himself in the country;

later, when they could afford a *pied-à-terre* in London (Mona noticed that "when" and its significance) a house in the country might be the final solution of their housing problem. Meantime, Shane was inclined to congratulate himself upon his skill in finding a house ("even a house that is too big, darling," said Mona) in Bayswater, at a time when houses were at a premium; pointed out that Dickie would not know the difference between the country and Kensington Gardens and that the nearness of their new abode to Marne House rendered the studio at the bottom of the garden there a practical proposition as a work-room for Mona "until we can get something fixed up at home."

"You'll have time for lots of work now," Shane said, "lots of time for work and me. You aren't going to be a drudge and a nurse any longer. All *that's* over."

Shane was very certain of that. All their troubles were at an end—or would be, shortly—"if this goes on."

It went on. It looked like going on for ever. On the strength of it, Shane signed contracts for the American edition of *Mirage* and for the as yet unfinished and nameless MS. which Master Richard had so seriously interrupted. Success suited Shane: Mona noted the fact with a little instinctive hardening of her young heart. It seemed to her a dreadful thing that human happiness depended so much upon material prosperity. "I'd have been happy and content in an attic with you, my dear!" she thought sometimes, when she looked at Shane's happy face. And so she would have been, for she had never learnt the value of money and what money could do for you. But Shane had—and therein lay the difference. Success, too, suited Dickie (but Mona's heart leapt at that, in gratitude) or else it was that he was growing stronger, or that the colder weather agreed with him, or that he really did mistake Kensington Gardens for the country, or Rose, his new nurse, for his mother. Certainly he accepted her without question, when Mona left him to her for some part of each day, though never for so long as Shane would have wished.

"He wears you out," he said. "You give yourself no rest,

And it's unnecessary. If you would only try to realise that ! Rose knows her job. You leave her to it and pay a little attention to me."

She smiled.

"You've been neglected ?"

"Lord, no, not in that way. But man shall not live by bread alone. Certainly not Shane Mostyn. I want a little bit of the old you : a little less of Dickie's mother : a little more of my wife. We're going to see people : we're going *out*. We're going to entertain. You're going to be seen and admired—and you're going to have a little time for yourself, old girl, and for your work."

So they entertained and went out and saw people, and Mona wore some delightful new frocks and played the hostess to admiring guests. The faint pink came back into her face, from which some of the newer shadows had departed. To the old girlish beauty was added now a touch of maturity that seemed to give it depth and meaning. But Shane complained that her photographs made her look sad.

"Darling, you haven't married a chorus girl. I *can't* have toothsome photographs, and when I *shut* my mouth that expression just comes."

Shane laughed and said it was the sweetest mouth on any woman, and a lot of other things not perhaps so irrelevant as Mona seemed to think them, impressed a fervent kiss upon it and took himself off.

During the early months of the new year, Mona settled down to a period of quiet work, using little Michael Mardinor and her own small son as models. A satisfied, delighted Eve came into the studio sometimes, and watched her working. She, too, thought all Monica's troubles were at an end, and grew so pleased with Shane and the success he was making of things that she almost forgot that discreditable past, until she one day saw an announcement in the paper that Miss Patricia Ramsden, the well-known woman journalist, was going to America to lecture.

"If America can stand Patricia, it can stand anyone," Eve said to Mona who, under a pretext of altering Richard Frank's

position on the rug before the studio fire, was kissing the top of his curly head.

"You never did appreciate Patricia, darling," Mona said. "Did you?"

"Well, she wasn't *lacking* appreciation, anyway," her mother said, and then, plunging. "Does Shane ever see her now?"

"Not that I know of. We never talk about her."

No, one didn't, of course. . . . Eve remembered that she, too, never had. . . .

"Very wise, darling," she said, "very wise."

The pretty new colour in Mona's cheeks deepened slightly.

"Oh, I don't mean that," she said, "I don't mean that we're *afraid* to talk about her, only that we just haven't—we haven't *thought* about her."

The colour in Mona's face stopped there a long while. It was there when she lifted Dickie from his rug and sent him off to be wheeled in the gardens by Rose, and it was still there when Eve bustled off to some appointment and when she turned back to the little plaster head.

It was at the beginning of April when Greta came in one fine warm afternoon to tea, looking very pretty in her new Spring costume and very relieved at finding Mona alone.

"One can never tell, these days," she said, "you've grown so important. I quite expected you to have a lot of big-wigs to tea, and people who talk about other people in books frighten me to death."

Throughout the meal Greta chattered about nothing in particular, and then, when the cups disappeared, uttered the one thing that mattered, the one thing she had come to say.

"Mona, I *wish* you'd go and see Reuben for me."

"You wish *what*?" Mona was making a new hat for Dickie. She held it up for Greta to look at. "Isn't it sweet?" she said.

"Dinky," said Greta. "Mona, *will* you?"

"Will I go and see Reuben? But why? I haven't seen Reuben for years, not since . . ." She stopped and began again. "Not since that Whitsuntide at Latchmere . . . years ago." Such an expressionless face bending over Dickie's "dinky" hat! She might have remembered nothing.

"I know," said Greta, "but, Mona, I *do* want him to let me go and he goes on saying 'No,' and reminding me of my 'vows.' I had no right to leave him, he says. I'd taken him on and promised to stick to him. *That* comes of getting married in church in white satin and orange-blossom." For Greta, she was unexpectedly bitter.

"But why do you suppose that I can make Reuben alter his point of view?" Mona wanted to know.

"Well, he might listen to you: I'm not clever enough to deal with Reuben; you *used* to be able to. Besides, he never cared for me, really—or not for long. I'm not his sort."

"Am I?"

"Well, he used to be very fond of you."

"My dear child," Mona laughed. "This sounds a very immoral proposal. I assure you, Reuben has forgotten my very name!"

Greta flushed. "*Has* he!" she said, "that's all *you* know!" and then: "Oh, Mona, I have got to do *something*. I get sick thinking and thinking . . ."

"Do you mean that Mark . . ."

"No, I don't; but I think he might if Reuben would get out of the way. I tell you, Mona, he doesn't care a scrap about me really: he's only getting his own back because I left him, made him look a fool, so he says. You see, he suspects I'm fond of Mark. . . . No man ever really believes you leave him because you just can't stand him. It's always 'some other man.'"

"And what happens," Mona wanted to know, "if Reuben resists my fascinations and continues to say 'No'?"

"Nothing, I suppose. You see, I haven't any influence over Mark. I mean, I couldn't make him do something he didn't want to do; something he thought wrong. He doesn't think I ought to have left Reuben, you know. He never forgets that Reuben's there. You know, Mark *despises* people who . . . who do that sort of thing. Lack of character he calls it. You can't alter him." She gulped a little and looked away. "I don't believe I'd try . . ."

Mona looked at her. "She *has* tried, poor kid, and given it

up," she thought. "It wouldn't be very profitable trying to alter Mark. . . ."

"You just mean to drift on?" she said.

"I suppose I mean to do that. I don't know. I never think about that part of it, if I can help it." She gulped again and her eyes were bright. "After all, I've got Michael: p'raps he's all I'm meant to have. . . . I don't know."

"And Mark? Do you think he'd drift, too?"

Greta said: "I don't know . . . sometimes, I think he'd just clear off . . . go abroad. You know he's always wanted to go to Canada. And that cousin of his is coming home this summer."

"Harry Blunsdon. Yes, I know," said Mona. She knew what Greta was thinking.

"If it'll help you," she said, "I'll certainly see Reuben. But I haven't any influence and I wouldn't advise you to build on it in any way."

"I'd be most awfully grateful," Greta said. "You see, if I could only get something definite out of Reuben before . . . before the summer."

"Before Harry comes, you mean? But he may not come until the spring. It isn't a bit settled. Greta, *you* wouldn't care about Canada?"

Greta nodded. "I'd go like a shot, with Mark. I wouldn't care where it was."

"It's an awfully wild place." Mona stroked the lace on Dickie's cap reflectively. "Miles and miles from the nearest doctor."

Greta smiled.

"*That* doesn't frighten me. I'm never ill."

So Mona saw Reuben, who, as she said, was "proof against her fascinations." And he obviously knew all about Mark and Greta.

"I hear you're making a bronze study of my son!" he said. "If it's in the Academy I'll come and look at it."

"Thanks," Mona said, and then: "You seem to be extremely well supplied with information."

Mardinor smiled. He was less debonair than of old: he was

growing fat and pouchy, but he looked prosperous and his tongue was still amusing.

"No one better," he said cheerfully.

She thought: He's having them watched. How horrible! and then, How perfectly futile! To watch *Mark*!

"I seem to be wasting my time!" she said.

"You never did make the best of your time with me, my dear!" he said. "There were others, I believe, more fortunate."

Mona did not turn a hair. She smiled—that confident slightly insolent smile of the woman who has made mistakes, can never make them again, and refuses to let the knowledge of them disturb her.

"We never spoke the same language, Reuben. We don't speak it now," she said, and went, upheld by the knowledge that if it had been (and it had!) a thoroughly unpleasant interview, it had not been quite useless, since it had given her that piece of information at which Greta smiled.

"To watch Mark! How silly!" she said. "And how funny! Why, he hasn't even *kissed* me!"

The heat, that abnormal summer of twenty-one began early, so early that by the end of May, even the long days in Kensington Gardens were obviously not sufficient to keep Dickie constant to his new blissful mood of contentment, so that Mona, always glad of any excuse to get into the country, was furnished unexpectedly with an excellent one for getting there at once. Shane just then was busy seeing his new book through the press; he was committed to the hilt in the matter of social and lecture engagements, and maintained steadily that he could not possibly leave London for a couple of months. Failing altogether to make Mona realise that that constituted a good reason why she also should refrain from leaving it, Shane eventually took a small furnished house in Devonshire, where he planned that Dickie and the capable Rose should be installed during the summer, Mona accompanying them and remaining until he was free to take her to Norway, towards which country their holiday ambitions had long stretched out impotent hands.

"This," said Shane, driving down to Paddington that stifling morning at the end of May, "is a concession. I don't know how I am going to endure that house without you and the idea of those awful lectures appals me, now that I'm not going to see your face in the front row. And what about your own work? You won't be able to do much down in Devon—no sculpture, anyway."

"I can paint," Mona said, "you know I want to get something worth while done in water-colour, and London this year is too dreadful. I shan't do anything if I remain."

"Don't you *mind* going . . . don't you mind leaving *me*?"

A funny little smile turned up the corners of Mona's mouth.

"You won't miss me very much, you know," she said.

"*Won't* I?" Shane was indignant. "I just can't bear the place without you."

She said quietly: "We don't see very much of each other, these days, Shane."

"Well, is that my fault? I *have* to shut myself up with my work. Surely you don't want me to tell you that?"

"No, I don't want you to tell me that. What I mean is that we are so seldom alone: we hardly ever see each other, except in the presence of other people. We are always wearing our best clothes and our sweetest smiles. We never sit by the fire in dressing-gowns and slippers. . . ."

"Don't be unreasonable, my dear girl. I *have* to see people. I have to have people to see *me*. It's necessary. It's good for us."

"I'm not disputing that it's all very necessary, darling. I'm only asserting that it's not going to make much difference—my absence, I mean. We shan't really see much less of each other than we do now."

"Rot!" said Shane, "all rot. The point is, I shall have to go out *alone* . . . I shall know, all the time, that you aren't in the house."

"Handy when you want me," said Mona.

"Well, *can't* a man want his wife occasionally? Don't you know how proud I am of you, how I positively gloat over you when I see you come into a room, or sitting at our dinner table?"

There isn't anybody who can touch you. I'm a perfect fool about you : everybody knows it. I egg people on to talk about you—and about your work. I adore everything about you—the way you walk, the way you say things : your smile ; the way you wear your clothes ; that little aloof air of yours with people, especially with men. You don't know how you've improved these last six months, since Master Dickie stopped wringing you dry."

Again that funny little smile turned up the corners of Mona's beautiful mouth. She sat watching the traffic spin by, the pedestrians hurrying along the crowded pavements or dodging the nimble taxi in the roadway, the army of crowded Juggernauts. But she was not thinking about the traffic. Her thoughts went a little heavily like this : " He's proud of me . . . he likes to show me off. He has a grudge even against his child, because he takes a little of the shine off his treasure. . . . Even my work he only sees as an additional appendage. A pretty little toy : a nice, *clever*, pretty little toy . . . that moves about gracefully, smiles, looks aloofly at other men and talks charmingly. . . . "

She remembered with dismay that she had thought like this before—about some other man !

" Well ? " said Shane. " What about it ? "

She looked away from the traffic to the man at her side.

" I don't know ! " she said.

" *Bored* with all that praise ? "

" Bored ? " She still smiled. " No, not *bored*, darling—but a little amused, I think. "

" You think I'm a fool—that *all* men are fools about some woman or other. Is that it ? "

" Not fools, darling, exactly. But you're all so terribly *alike* ! "

" Well, it's more than I can say for you," he laughed, drawing his arm through hers. " You're like nobody, like no other woman I've ever met. You're . . . you're *unique*. "

" That's rather clever of you," she told him. " Most men would have said ' wonderful,' or ' charming,' or ' fascinating.' I used to get awfully tired, you know, of all three. "

I remember being very grateful for 'unique' the first time I heard it."

"You *couldn't* be 'unique' to anyone who didn't know you intimately. The man was talking through his hat."

Her little laugh came just the tiniest bit too late, so that he knew, perfectly, who it was that had first earned her gratitude for that word "unique." His lean face was still dark with the knowledge when the taxi turned into Paddington Station, so that Mona, looking at him, began talking animatedly about a thousand things, but she did not want to talk. She felt that she wanted to remain silent for ever, withdrawn into the dark secret places of her own mind.

Ships adrift, in a sea of marriage, unknown, uncharted. Not so. They knew the rocks and pitfalls, she and Shane, too thoroughly. They could not keep away from them: they sailed near to them just to see how near they might come and yet escape. That sort of thing could not go on for ever. The misery of that certainty sat dumbly in Mona's eyes when, the good-byes said, she leaned back in her corner and watched London being left behind. When it had disappeared utterly, she opened the novel she had brought with her, but she could not read it. It was a woman's book, clever, immensely-well reviewed, but it might, so Mona thought, just as well have been written by a man. Had women *no* attitude to life of their own that they must be for ever aping man? Was no woman-writer free from this insinuating vanity that clamoured always for masculine approval? Nothing, as she had realised in those old Chelsea days, ever pleased the woman-novelist half so much as being mistaken by some reviewer for a man, or credited, at least, with a "masculine mind." And it was the masculine mind with which Mona just now was out of patience. Who would want one? The masculine mind held prejudices and traditions . . . prejudices and traditions at least where women were concerned. And had women nothing better to do than repeat them? Had they no standards of their own; no conceptions of what feminine existence ought to be? Mona snapped the covers of her book with precision. This extraordinary insinuating female

vanity!—it was behind everything that women did, behind everything women had ever done. It explained why they had done so little—this desire to please men, to win their approval.

She could have forgiven the husband-hunters; but these women with brilliant minds! It was they who were guilty of the real act of sex-betrayal. That was why it was so much harder to forgive them. . . .

Queer that that dark look on Shane's face should have landed her here. Yet, with perfect distinctness, she could have traced her steps.

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CHAPTER SIX

LIFE was an extraordinary affair, a sad, disappointing business, perhaps, but it had its moments. That long journey in the train had been singularly lacking in them, but one way or another there were undeniably a good many of them in Devonshire during that hot June and July of twenty-one. Mona loved the country and was happier there than anywhere else, in the way, surely, that Wordsworth must have been happy in a wood, so that the idea of returning to town became daily more unendurable to her.

It went on being unendurable to her, even when Shane's every letter became at once a plea that she should come back and a protest against what he considered her covert attempts to persuade him instead into Devon. It began to appear that Shane's desire to shine in this business of out-of-doors had indeed been a temporary affair, and, with his ambitions concerning compasses and charts, was already a thing of the past. Shane, suggested that little wayward imp that sat even yet in Mona's mind, was no longer competing with the dead; but it was a Mona with mind swept of all imps of waywardness and garnished with a sense of humour who acknowledged a more cheerful truth than that: *Shane wrote prettily about the country; he did not live in it.*

Their letters, nevertheless, evinced a tendency to degenerate into a battle of wills. "You must see," Shane wrote, "that I am perfectly reasonable. I don't ask you to bring Dickie back. There isn't any need to sacrifice Dickie. Dickie can quite well remain with the capable Rose." And Mona wrote back indignantly that Dickie could quite well do nothing of

the sort. Then Shane put it plainly. "Because you are Dickie's mother, you are not any the less my wife. Forgive me for reminding you that I have claims as well as Dickie and cannot be said to have pressed them unduly. But do not imagine that I will for ever permit you to sacrifice yourself entirely to this young man's convenience—and to sacrifice me. I hate to say it, darling, but I'm sure it's true: Dickie won't miss you a scrap if you leave him Devon and the budding Rose. Both seem to suit him admirably. I've seen you for a Saturday and Sunday out of six whole weeks. Don't you agree that you are a heartless wife?"

She did not. She saw clearly that nothing kept him in town but his inclination. The social engagements were nothing; he built too much upon them. He could see her if and whenever he desired. He deliberately put his ambitions, his vanity, before their need of each other and then complained that she was an inconsiderate wife. He would give up nothing—not one tittle of his success, his social triumphs—what he called his opportunity; would not step even for a single moment out of that terrible limelight. She hardened her heart; stifled the longing that came to her at times for the touch of his hands, the sound of his voice; and turned her love again into those quiet, even regretful paths in which it seemed to her it had walked now for so long. She could not leave Dickie behind and she would not sacrifice him to the frequent exigency of her own desire.

So, inevitably, they arrived at deadlock; knew it for deadlock and stopped writing to one another. Yet every morning, with excited pulse, Mona watched the postman go by, or turned over with indifferent hands what he had left for her.

Then came the dinner at the Vasavour, at which Shane was to be the guest of the evening, and to which Mona was also invited. "Walk down to the post-office to-morrow morning and ring me up," Shane wrote, and then the usual complaint: "Why did I ever take a house not upon the telephone?" To Shane, the telephone was still an entrancing toy. Mona remembered the friendly air with which he took down the receiver and the confiding way in which he

acquainted the Exchange with his wishes. But to Mona the telephone was merely the thing which filled up for them their days and nights ; kept them eternally from their dressing-gowns and slippers and the mood which approximated to them. She hated it.

Nevertheless, ringing Shane that early July morning, she was frightened at the way her heart leapt at the sound of his voice at the other end. And when Shane said, "Well, are you coming?" there was only one possible answer, though there had seemed to be quite an alarming number as she had walked down from the house. "Of course I'm coming!" she said, and her heart leapt again when Shane said, "You won't find it very easy, you know, to get away again. When I *get* you I mean to *keep* you." And through all the conversation that followed, she was aware that she was fighting, not his desire to keep her, but her amazing desire—like a flame, an engulfing sea—to *be kept*. Yet she stuck to compromise. The dinner was on the twenty-first, a Thursday? Very well: she would go up on the Wednesday night train and stay until the following Monday. "The week-end," she said, "five days. . . . Won't that do?" And Shane said with some vehemence that it would not do at all, before the girl at the Exchange decided that the conversation had gone on long enough and summarily cut them off. Feeling utterly cowardly, Mona went out quickly, before Shane could get through to her again. "Now we shall argue it all out on paper, I suppose," she thought, as she strode up the cliff in the stout shoes Shane always found so incongruous upon her. But an argument on paper could be better sustained, she comforted herself, than one across the telephone wires. At least in the epistolary battle the unequal factor of that disturbing voice would not be present.

But their immediate letters, as it happened, were about something quite other; for two days later, Dickie developed a troublesome throat, for which such drastic treatment (in Mona's opinion) was suggested that she held back from it until she could consult, as Shane put it, the "family oracle." But the family oracle was in Vienna and could not be consulted, so it was Shane who went about collecting the expert

advice of which his next few letters were full. Expert advice said the treatment was usual, even if in a child of Dickie's age the symptoms necessitating it were not. "But then," as Shane admitted, "Dickie's no ordinary child." Idiotic, in Shane's view, to approach Aunt Maud in Vienna and why, anyhow, make a family affair of it? No sense, either, in bringing Dickie up to town for the business. It was stifling in London and Dickie would be sure to hate that. Moreover, it was no part of Shane's scheme to have the claims of an ailing Dickie competing with his own when next Mona came to town. "There isn't any risk," he wrote, "though, of course, you won't want to let him lick the paint off his bricks afterwards or get at your water-colour box. It's the simplest of operations, I'm told, if a bit messy. Done on hundreds of youngsters—sort of thing they do at any London hospital on a dozen in a morning, and send 'em home afterwards, too. Older children than Dickie, I admit"—and then that piece about the untimeliness of Dickie's symptoms and that comment that smiled up from the paper, "Dickie's no ordinary youngster."

And at the end an apologetic postscript. "If this all sounds very unconcerned and detached, it's only because I'm so horribly aware all the time that you're neither. It isn't Dickie *I'm* worrying about, but *you*. But, of course, if you like I'll send you down a man from town. . . ."

Mona did like. The man from town came down: the throat was attended to and all went well. For ten days Dickie was a person of undoubted importance in the scheme of things and was then declared convalescent, so that a week later even Mona thought it a little unreasonable of him to be so fractious during the last few hours she spent with him on the afternoon of that auspicious Wednesday, the twentieth.

"Do you think he's going to have a relapse?" she asked the capable Rose, who failed to perceive the signs. She said, "He eats his food and just look at the colour he's getting. He just knows you're going—that's what it is. Tyrant, aren't you?" she smiled at him.

"But perhaps I'd better *not* go," Mona said, and it was her

turn to smile when Rose said, "Oh, but Mr. Mostyn will be so disappointed if you don't." Not only *Mr.* Mostyn, Mona thought, a little appalled at herself for wanting so much to go, for feeling ever so slightly aggravated because Dickie flung his fractious mood forbiddingly in her path. "Shane *can't* want to see me more than I want to see him. Oh, Dickie, darling, let mummy go."

And Dickie let her. In the last resort Dickie made no protest of any sort. He obligingly went to sleep and remained asleep, even when the taxi came pantingly up the steep climb to the house and Mona stole in to kiss him good-bye; an unusually soundly-sleeping Dickie, indifferent to strange feet upon the garden path, to a strange voice in the hall inquiring about luggage, and to that long kiss his mother came back to repeat. "Tired out with his tantrums," Rose said, shutting the door of the taxi with the air of one who felt herself more than a match for Dickie, which always affected Mona so pleasurably, because she never felt it herself.

Nevertheless, all the way to the station and more than half-way to town, she thought of Dickie in his rosebud sleep and half-wished, even now, that she had not come. But as the train ran into Paddington Station, she could scarcely bear to look at the platform in case Shane should not have come to meet her.

Then she saw that he had.

He came at her like an excited schoolboy, kissed her clumsily and bundled her into a taxi. As they turned out of the station, he twisted her round by the shoulders and looked at her.

"You lovely thing!" he said gravely, and his eyes devoured her. "Glad to see me?"

"Very," she said, but she blinked a little and she could feel her heart thumping madly against her ribs. Also, she found it was a little difficult to control her voice. These things dismayed her, because she had come to believe that she had taught her body discipline. "Are we going home?" she asked.

She had left Devonshire by the seven o'clock train and had

travelled all night. It was now three in the morning and deliciously cool.

"Home? Rather!" said Shane, "to breakfast. I've given orders that you're not to be disturbed for lunch. You're to go to sleep. I want you fresh and beautiful for to-night. Your function is to shine."

"You seem," she said, "to have it all very nicely mapped out. But aren't you tired, too?"

"No good being tired . . . I've tons of things to do. I find it very restful, you know, just to look at you."

He pulled her up suddenly against him and began kissing her face, her mouth, her eyes, her cheeks, but when he released her she sat back in her corner as though she were suddenly very tired. She looked a little overwhelmed and shaken—rather as if something she believed stunned had risen and given her a blow between the eyes.

Only when he continued his programme, began to outline their days together, did she remember Dickie, and simultaneously she remembered that Shane had not even mentioned him; had not even asked how he was.

"But I had a letter from you this morning," Shane objected, "which told me lots about Dickie and nothing whatever about yourself. Do be reasonable, darling."

She tried to be reasonable. To the extent of exonerating him from any unfatherly unsolicitude, she *was* reasonable; but even she would have hesitated to apply the word to her sudden decision to go back to Devon that night after the dinner was over.

And Shane laughed—he thought it as little reasonable as all that. He said: "Go back? Don't talk nonsense! Of course you can't go back."

She explained, but even to herself the new bulletin about Dickie did not seem very distressing. Moreover, Shane listened with that little bored air she had come to know so well and to resent.

"My dear girl," he said, when she had finished, "won't you ever learn to be sensible on this subject? You can't seriously mean to spoil all our plans because Dickie was

fractious at being left? Of *course* he was fractious. I expect you and the capable Rose between you have danced unremitting attendance upon him during the last two weeks, and now he's taking advantage."

"But Shane, I really am a little worried."

"You think you *ought* to be. You think you've behaved outrageously, because for five minutes you've let me oust the young gentleman. Well, I'm *going* to oust him, this trip, unless you can convince me that there is the slightest reason to suppose there's anything really the matter with him."

She could not. Though she said it all again and said it differently, she added nothing to it. However she phrased it, Dickie remained not a sick, but only a fretful child. That was how Shane was beginning to see this son of his—as a spoilt and pampered youngster, about whom far too much fuss was continually made.

She said, weakly: "A fretful child *is* a sick child, Shane."

"Now, look here," said Shane. "I assume you've told that girl to send for a doctor if there's the slightest sign that the boy's really unwell, and to walk down to the post office and get on the 'phone to you here?"

"Of course."

"Very well, then." He smiled at her. "*Isn't* it 'very well?'"

She wanted to say: "Yes, of *course* it's 'very well,'" but she said instead: "After all, he did have that nasty thing done to his throat."

"Which is done to children's throats every day," Shane said. "It's the commonest of operations, and probably damned unnecessary, too. The children of the poor go to the hospital for it at twelve and leave at three, if that's any consolation to you. Do be sensible about it, Mona."

So she sat there trying hard to be sensible: trying hard to forget Dickie. She wanted to forget Dickie, because she wanted so much to stay. And Shane was saying that he began to believe that that was exactly what she did not want. "You're forcing me to believe that you don't care for me any longer," he said, "that the mother in you has killed the

lover." He was exactly like a schoolboy who has seen half his apple given to another. Why *wouldn't* he grow up?

"Don't be silly," she said. "It just isn't possible I don't want to stay."

"Then why defraud yourself . . . why defraud *Us* for a mere hysterical fancy? Darling, do see it from my point of view."

She saw his point of view; she saw her own, and she saw Dickie's. Who needed her the more?—Shane or Dickie? Was she indeed merely being hysterical? True, she did not really believe there was anything wrong with Dickie; she was just truckling to her absurd fear that there might be . . . that something—anything—might happen to him if she were not there. Of course, that *would* look idiotic to Shane; it looked a bit idiotic to her, now that she looked at it hard. But she bit her lip when Shane said: "I'm coming to believe that there isn't anything half so selfish in the world as a 'good mother.' In nine cases out of ten, it's pure self-indulgence." And then, seeing her gloomy face, he added, smilingly: "Don't be self-indulgent, darling. Indulge *me* instead."

Shane wanted her. That was not all. She wanted Shane, wanted him so badly that the only really self-indulgent thing, for her, would be to stay. She hoped Dickie was going to let her forget.

She would stay that night, she said, if no ill tidings came from Rose during the evening.

"And the week-end? . . . I've arranged such a lot of things for the week-end. Darling, you *must* stay."

But she would promise nothing about the week-end. She did not believe Dickie was going to let her forget for as long as that. Shane took his half-apple with something suspiciously like a snatch. In his heart, he did not really believe she would insist upon going . . . not if he made himself nice enough. He meant to be very nice indeed.

"The time we waste!" he said. "Do you realise that we've been arguing all the way from Paddington?"

"Well, it isn't very far," said Mona, "is it?"

They got back that evening from the Vasavour at eleven

o'clock. There was no message from Devonshire. The 'phone, it seemed, had been peculiarly inactive all the evening. Two calls only, said the maid, both for Mr. Mostyn, and neither would leave any message.

Mona, regal in her long blue cloak, gave a little sigh of relief. Shane looked at her, the pink colour in her cheeks, the light on her hair; and that blue velvet against her white skin. . . . He came and put his hands on her shoulders.

"So that's settled," he said. "You stay."

"For to-night."

"*At least*, for to-night."

She smiled.

"And *at least for to-night* may we please forget Master Richard?"

She said nothing to that. Beneath his hands he could feel her shoulders trembling.

"Cold?"

"In this cloak—and on such a night?"

"But you were trembling . . . you're doing it now."

"Not with the cold."

Long after Shane was asleep that night Mona lay awake, watching the moonlight threading the room with silver. She thought it must be because the night was so hot that she could not sleep, or because, perhaps, she had lost the trick of sleep in London, missing the quiet grave beauty of the country night, the velvety darkness beyond her window, the soft blurred outlines of the trees.

In the morning she had a headache, which Shane seemed to think a little tiresome of her.

"Didn't you sleep?" he asked.

"Not very well."

He looked at her.

"You look like a ghost," he said, "and there are at least three new shadows on your face."

That was tiresome of her, too, of course. She felt he was reproaching her for being less beautiful this morning than she had been overnight. He wanted her always beautiful and free. Beautiful and free for him; he hated the things which

distracted her. Something she did not know she had remembered, something Greta Mardinor had said long ago of Reuben, swam swiftly into her mind, "It's not a wife he wants, but a mistress."

"Shane," she said suddenly. "Has it occurred to you that the Post Office at Upborough closes at eight?"

"No. But what about it?"

"Only that there couldn't, in any case, have been any message from Rose last night."

Shane smiled.

"When did this great thought occur to you?" he asked.

"I don't know. In the night, I suppose. It was there . . . in my mind . . . when I first woke, about five."

"It doesn't strike you, I suppose, that the Post Office hasn't the only 'phone in the place, and that Rose is a young woman of resource? She didn't 'phone, because there just wasn't anything to 'phone about. Why not try to believe that the simple thing is also quite frequently the true thing?"

"But Dickie gets ill so easily."

"I'm aware of it," said Shane. "But isn't it a little superfluous to think he's ill when he isn't?" He sounded bored. Tiresome of her to have given him a delicate child—like having those three extra shadows on her face and looking less beautiful than she had looked overnight. She made an effort and got it out. She wanted to catch the eleven o'clock train . . . Shane must relinquish this particular week-end. She offered him the next. She said: "I'll not have a moment's peace if I stop, Shane. . . ."

Shane demurred. If there were one single symptom she could point to . . . one single one. "I'm being reasonable . . ." He held up his reasonableness like a garment for her inspection. "Just one, Mona. *Half* a one!" He smiled. He would respect even that half-symptom, because—women were like that.

She could not produce as much as even that half-symptom. . . . Very well. Mere nerves, hysteria. . . . Women ought *not* to be like *that*. The argument was still raging when they went down, very late, to breakfast.

It was raging when the telephone bell rang and Shane was

called out to answer it. She meant to go. She threw an anxious glance at the clock when Shane went out, and another as he put his head in at the door and said: "The McNaughtens, Mona. They want us for lunch to-day. They're very pressing. Won't you come and speak?"

Still with that anxious eye upon the clock, she said: "Please excuse me. Say I'm rushing for my train."

The face in the doorway darkened, disappeared. Mona went on with her breakfast. An irritable-looking Shane came back and went on with his. He said: "You really mean to go?"

"Won't you take it that I really can't *help* it? . . . It isn't my fault, darling."

The conversation flagged until Shane said suddenly: "The McNaughtens wanted you to meet a man interested in your work. He's seen that thing of young Mardinor in the Draycott and wants to give you a commission."

"Must he see me to offer me that?" Mona smiled. "Has the art of letter-writing decayed as badly as all that?"

"I gathered that it wasn't quite the usual sort of commission. You'd have to work from photographs."

"Photographs? Why?"

"The boy's dead, it seems."

Mona said: "Oh!"—rather as though the boy were somebody she had known. She sounded shocked and her smile went out like a snuffed candle.

Shane was saying: "I promised to see if I couldn't get you to alter your mind."

"Please don't," Mona said quickly.

"I believe you're afraid I might succeed," Shane said.

She looked up at him quickly, then away again.

"I've an idea," he said. "Why not 'phone through to the office at Upborough and ask them to send a message up to the house? They could 'phone Rose's reply through to us. I'll get on to them."

Mona looked at the clock.

"There isn't time," she said. "It's half an hour's walk up from the village, even if they had anybody to send, and they

probably won't have. If I wait for the reply I can't possibly catch the 10.50. There's nothing else until four o'clock."

Shane gave it up. But he did not accept defeat gracefully. To the last, he held on to his grievance.

"You're making our life together a farce," he told her. "If you've a scrap of affection for me you'll try to be more reasonable, more like other women with their kids. Look at Ruth McNaughten and Jerry!"

Mona looked at them but the sight did not move her to words.

"Ruth doesn't go everlastingly fussing around imagining he's sickening for something or other," Shane went on. "Jerry fits in. Why can't you make Dickie? At present, he's simply cutting our life together in two. After all, old girl, I didn't marry a madonna."

And though he bought her papers and chocolates on the ten-fifty and made her comfortable in her corner, rather as though he were an indulgent parent fussing around an unreasonable child, he let her go with that thought—that he had not married a madonna, that Dickie was cutting their lives in two. . . .

Shane got back to the house feeling cheated, bored and irritated, and though he sat himself down to his desk for an hour that morning, literature had but a thin time of it. He strenuously resisted the thought that had come to him more than once lately that Mona's absence was making a difference to his work both in quality and quantity. Yet whenever he remembered Mona rushing away from him through the coloured counties, his brain, like an impartial tape-machine, ticked off that thought: "I can't work without her!" and he could see Mona's funny little smile and imagine her quiet speech in reply: "But, darling, you couldn't work *with* me!" or perhaps she would say "with *us*!"

Well, anyway, he was going to leave Mona severely alone; he was going to wait until she acknowledged by letter or 'phone that she had once again sacrificed him at the dictates of an ancient instinct. He was going to wait until, of her

own accord, she came back to him or asked him to go back to her. And he did not care how long he waited !

What a fool he had been to let her go. He had her. Why couldn't he keep her ? That was the core of his irritation—not that Mona had left him, but that he had not been able to prevent her. And yet of what use a corporeal Mona with her mind elsewhere ? He understood that he had not so much wanted her to stop as wanted her to want to stop. That was where his real failure with Mona had lain from the first—he had not been able to maintain his supremacy in her mind. Everlastingly he had shared her with somebody else ; there never had been a time when he had had her entirely to himself.

That, by various and rather dangerous stages, brought him presently to Dickie, this ailing baby Dickie, an adept at attracting all childish ailments to himself, who did not include fathers in his scheme of things and for whom Shane felt so surprising a lack of affection. A lively romping seven-year-old Dickie he believed he could have amply appreciated ; nevertheless, he did perceive himself lacking in some common human quality ; laboured continually under a sense of shame and deprivation, because Mona had so strongly what he seemed not to have at all. Disappointed in himself as a father, because he felt so few of the things the fathers of his own creation had so unhesitatingly felt, his mood of animosity against Mona's maternity tended always to deepen. He felt thwarted, cheated—excluded ; and felt these things this morning so acutely that he was badly in need of some corrective to his damaged self-esteem.

At twelve o'clock he abandoned his miserable pretence of work, went upstairs, packed a bag and rang to inform a maid that he was going out of town and would want a taxi in a quarter of an hour. He would probably return on Sunday evening and gave her the telephone number of an hotel at Brighton. The hotel was small, exclusive and expensive, and Shane went to it for these reasons. His money, like his private telephone, was still a very new and delightful toy. He chose Brighton because there you easily found pleasant things to

do ; its country was what Shane called discreet, which meant that though it did not force itself upon you (so that if you wished you could ignore it) it had not entirely cut itself off from the delights of civilisation. It had artfully persuaded buses and trams to run up to its edge.

As he went through the hall the telephone rang. The maid handed him the receiver with that blankness of countenance Mona always found so chilling. Her well-trained maids never looked as though they felt anything ; they never really *knew* anything ; they had always been " told " or " informed."

" Mrs. McNaughten again, sir."

" All right, get me a taxi," Shane said, and went to the 'phone to hear Ruth McNaughten's cheery voice bidding him come along, *solus*, to lunch.

" Now don't say you can't. . . . Going out of town ? Well, you can go on from here. Surely you can go out to lunch with old friends, even if your wife can't be persuaded to come and hold your hand ? Besides, I didn't tell you this morning, but somebody's to be here you'll be pleased to see. . . . No, I shan't say who it is. . . . You must come and see. . . . No, not for a long while, I understand . . . Brighton ? Oh, *dozens* of trains. . . ."

Shane went to the McNaughtens' flat in South Kensington by way of Victoria, that he might dispose of his bag. Nice of Ruth, after his refusal of the morning, to ring him up again. . . . And who was this " someone " he was to meet, whom he had not met for " a long while " ? You never knew *whom* you might meet at the McNaughtens'. They knew everybody. Jerry McNaughten, aged three and a half, had not prevented that desirable consummation. He permitted his parents to entertain and to be entertained. Shane liked Jerry. All a question of discipline, of course. Ruth had the rudiments of it and Mona had not—and that was all there was about it.

So Shane rode down in the hot sun from Victoria to Kensington.

It was Monday evening before he got back to town ; a neighbouring church clock was striking ten as he jumped out

of his taxi and stood for a moment talking to someone who remained inside, somebody who sat back well in the corner ; unseen, but feminine by the voice which presently wished him good night and gave him an address to pass on to the driver. Shane watched the taxi drive off, mounted the steps of his house, let himself in and stood for a moment scanning the note of the telephone calls which had come for him during his absence. None of them was from Mona, and none of them seemed important. He turned away with a shrug which might have meant irritation, but did seem rather to suggest relief. Then it occurred to him to turn the page, and there at the top of the sheet, marked "Sunday morning," the entry "Mrs. Mostyn, 10.15," was made, and immediately below it, "Same, 10.45." Shane smiled as though his thoughts were extremely pleasant, but the smile faded quickly, as though he had remembered something not pleasant at all. Then he saw that there was no entry of any sort beside the record of Mona's call ; no "would not leave a message" or "would write." Shane rang the bell and waited. A maid came hurrying up the stairs and along the passage. She obviously had something to say, but so had Shane.

"I see that Mrs. Mostyn has been on the 'phone. Did she leave any message ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why isn't it indicated ?"

"I thought I could explain it better myself, sir," said the girl, who found Shane's requisitions in regard to telephone messages the one really serious drawback to an otherwise satisfactory situation. "I meant to tell you directly you came in, sir. . . ."

"Very well," said Shane, and stood there looking bored. Mona's servants would have been perfect, he thought, if they had been less garrulous ; their short stories were all apt to become serials. He suspected Mona of encouraging them to talk, and Shane never wanted his servants to do more than answer questions.

"What was the message ?" he asked.

"She wanted to know if you could catch the Sunday train

down to Upborough, sir. She didn't say why. I told her you were out of town, and that we expected you back sometime that day. I gave her the number that you said, sir, at Brighton."

Shane looked up from the pile of letters he had taken up and was glancing through, but said nothing. The girl went on. "Half an hour later, sir, Mrs. Mostyn 'phoned to say that the hotel people said you were not there and that she thought I must have given her the wrong number."

"And had you?"

"No, sir."

"Was there any further message?"

"Only that I was to say that Master Richard was not well, and to ask you to catch the Sunday train down if you could, sir, and that it went at seven."

"Did she say what was the matter?"

"No, sir, she just said, 'Not well.'"

"I see. Bring me an A B C, will you?"

The A B C, when it came, told him what he had known already, that there was no train to Upborough that night save the midnight, but he spent some fruitless minutes over impossible connections at impossible junctions before he went upstairs, where he changed his collar, scowled at himself in the glass, and swore because it was nine o'clock and he could get in touch with Mona neither by wire nor by 'phone. Nevertheless, he went down again to the telephone and tried to ring the Upborough Post Office, but unsuccessfully. For all practical purposes Mona might as well have been at Timbuctoo. And he wished she had been. Nobody would have expected him to go travelling at midnight to Timbuctoo. He was oppressed by the accessibility of South Devonshire; looking for even the faintest shadow of a reason why he need not answer that wire in person, and finding nothing but the most definite reasons why he should.

They had not, on the whole, a tremendous amount to do with Dickie and Dickie's illness. He did not believe very much in that. A temperature, a cold. . . . He had lived in that atmosphere too long. Over Dickie Mona fussed. . . .

And now she had seized upon some paltry symptom or other as the excuse to prove herself right and him wrong. Mona getting her own back. He really believed that.

But he was in the mood to believe anything. He wanted to believe things mean and small about Mona, because he was feeling mean and small himself. So all the way to Devon he looked at the flaws in his crystal vase, and evoked from the process a consolation none the less welcome because it was also a little precarious.

He was feeling a good deal better by the time the train landed him at Upborough. He even enjoyed the walk up through the silent sleeping village and across the cliff path where the poppies hung out their scarlet banners in the wind, and far up the little white house blinked brightly in the early morning sunshine. But the house when he reached it was asleep, like the village. The blinds were still down, and the milk-can sat upon a ledge of the porch—benignly, like a great grey cat.

It seemed to him that he waited a very long while after knocking before steps sounded within; before the door opened and Mona stood there in front of him. She was very pale, and her eyes seemed to have grown enormous. She did not look in the very least like a woman engaged in "getting her own back." She looked—numb. A sense of acute discomfort seized upon Shane. He did not offer to kiss her, nor did she seem to expect it. She just stood there holding open the door whilst he stepped inside, wiped his feet mechanically and unnecessarily upon the mat and hung up his hat.

And with his back turned to her, he said casually, airily, as he had always meant to say: "Well, and how's the youngster?"

It could not really be true that Mona said, almost as though it did not matter in the least: "He's dead . . . he died this morning."

No, of course that could not be true. Mechanically he went and shut the door. The thing was so unexpected it simply did not touch him. It was like a thing heard in a dream. In another second he would wake up.

Then Mona said it again.

"He died this morning. At half-past five, of septic poisoning."

Shane moved forward and took her in his arms. She was so still it frightened him, and his mind vehemently explored the silence for something . . . suitable . . . to say, and found nothing. But his babble of inadequate words seemed to break the spell that bound her in stone. She came to life, moved out of his arms and a wave of passionate feeling ran swiftly over the dreadful numbness of her white face.

"Why do you pretend?" she said, with a quiet bitterness that was like an icy wind in Shane's face. "You never cared for him. He was always in your way." The faintest flicker of a smile twisted her mouth, plucked out the beauty from her face. "Why do you pretend you're not glad he won't be in your way any longer?"

Shane stared at her, appalled by the brutal truth of what she said. He never *had* cared for his ailing puny little son. But a thing as true as all that ought never to be put into words. He hated her because she did not know that, because she never had known it.

He could never forgive her. He turned and walked away down the hall into the garden beyond, and the sound of her terrible crying crept after him.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

IN the days that followed, Shane saw that one devastating sentence as a landmark, a kind of cairn, to which all their life together led, and from which it must move for ever away. Yet the journey downwards (the path from a cairn, Shane dismally reflected, is invariably downwards!) was some time beginning, and they sat grimly by their pile of stones for what seemed to Shane an age. Contemplating that quiet face that hid, surely, a most unquiet heart, he thought Mona morbid because she took so much responsibility for Dickie's death. How that really happened, nobody ever knew; some failure somewhere of the capable Rose—little doubt in Shane's mind that she lied to protect herself. He did not blame her very much for that; most people would have lied in similar circumstances, and Shane had looked with particular interest at the spectacle of Rose lying whole-heartedly. He thought she did it rather well. But as the weeks passed and Mona continued to maintain that Dickie would not have died if she had not gone to town, Shane's irritation rose and censured her gently for unreasonableness. "You couldn't have had your eye on him all the time. . . . After all, it was Rose's job, not yours, to see that he didn't get hold of the toys or the paint-box, or whatever it was. And it's almost certain that the harm was done before you left." But Mona, who never had believed (even when Shane, obstinately prosperous, persuaded her to have "a nurse for the kid, as other people do") that it was anybody's "job" but her own to guard Dickie from the perils of infantile existence, found small consolation in what Shane had to say on this point. "Rose fed him," she said. "She

thought there couldn't be anything much the matter with him because he seemed so ravenous. I could have prevented that." Shane, who knew nothing about illnesses, was never ill himself and was bored by other people's ailments, gathered from this that you do not feed people suffering from septic poisoning. Even so—even with Rose's over-feeding, and the acknowledged fact that a doctor should have been called at least a day sooner—Dickie should not have died. Nobody ever expected him to die, and any other child, Shane felt, would have behaved accordingly and have recovered. When Mona had 'phoned to Shane, she had not thought him even seriously ill; no one had told her what was the matter. "Bed—and no food. No matter how much he cries for it. No food." She had 'phoned—she had admitted it—just to show Shane that she had not really gone back, as he alleged, for a mere hysterical fancy, and to convict him of the injustice of the obnoxious adjective she had carefully clothed her telephone message in the quietest of words. "Not very well . . . a slight relapse. . . ." Neither she, nor anybody else, had expected that sudden turn for the worse on Sunday night. So like Dickie, of course, Shane thought, to do the unexpected thing! And how could Mona's presence several days earlier have prevented him from doing it? "The thing was inevitable, my dear child. It's only common sense to suppose that!"

But Mona had no common sense to bring to bear on her bereavement, and was not so much hurt as utterly benumbed by the spectacle of Shane beating up his so successfully. Always that quiet face hiding so inadequately that unquiet heart. "I ought to have stayed. . . . If I had I wouldn't, now, be reproaching myself. I wanted you more than I wanted him!"

Well, she did not want him very much, these days. She seemed almost to have forgotten he was there; so little interested in him and what he did, that she did not even comment upon his absence from the Brighton hotel to which he was supposed to have betaken himself. Perhaps she only saw it as outrageous that he could have gone off anywhere at all in the circumstances—that he should so completely have

believed in his own charge of hysteria—so that she really did not care, at the moment, where he had been or what he had done. And sometimes, as if he realised this, Shane had a surging desire to “wake her up,” to make her “care,” even if her “caring” were only hatred and hostility. He began to blame her for this suppression on his part of the Truth; he had gone to Devon meaning to suppress nothing at all; but one could not confess anything whatever to a white stone image. He did not know that he was glad of his reprieve; that he had in him a species of gratitude to Dickie for delivering him from the necessity of taking that little bit of Truth out of his heart and thrusting it down in front of Mona. Shane was very far from seeing himself as clearly as all that. What he *did* see—probably *all* he saw—was that white withdrawn look of Mona’s, that little air of utter indifference to all the rest of the world outside Dickie’s tiny coffin—and he was abashed by both. And by the sight of Mona quietly doing her duty. Nevertheless, he expected her to recover, for, despite his querulous complaints to the contrary, he had never really believed that Dickie was more to her than he was. At heart, no spider-woman, Mona.

For all that, she did not seem to be recovering very quickly. All of things positive that happened to her was that she was cured of her love for the country (“and of everything else,” Shane said). They went back to town and in the very nature of things began to move away from their pile of stones. There were things to do in London; all the loose strings of life to gather together again; but even here, gathering all the loose strings there were, that air of complete indifference did not drop away from Mona. “I don’t believe she cares a tuppenny damn for me any longer,” Shane told himself. She was stone . . . stone from her feet to the crown of her head. And as he had waited for her to come back to him from Devon, so now he waited for her to come to him here. He left her alone, waiting for the stone to come to life. And the stone remained stone.

What he did not understand and what, perhaps, she, too, was hardly conscious of, was that nothing, then, could have

saved him but the turned shoulder of that capricious jade, Fortune. And Fortune still faced him, a broad smile on her moody face. No help there at all, for either of them. Mona saw Shane, in so far as she saw him at all, as triumphant, popular, the ball at his feet, and most outrageously untouched by this thing that had struck at her heart. She could not forgive him for his immunity. He ought, at least, to have minded that he did not mind. "After all, he was our child!" she said, as though never in a thousand years could there be any answer to that. And lo! in his own day and generation, Shane had one.

"But, my dear girl, that, somehow, is what he never really seemed. He was always *your* child. . . . He didn't even like me—howled if I came near him. He wasn't intelligent even as babies go (and Shane seemed to think they did not go very far). If only he'd smiled at me sometimes . . . shown a little natural feeling. Probably by the time he was five or six, I'd have grown fearfully fond of him, but in those eighteen months, I hardly got to *know* him. . . . It's no good hating me because I don't feel as you do about it. After all, you saw a lot more of him than I did, and you'd known him nine months longer."

"I don't hate you," she said. Her terrible indifference held her back from anything half so violent. She only saw that the Shane she had known and loved was not there any longer. It was not only Dickie's death, but, in some sort, the things Dickie's death had revealed to her. Things about Shane that she had never seen before, though they must surely have been there all the time. Shane's soul was grown fat, like his purse, and it seemed to Mona now that she must have looked on at the process without knowing it for what it was. Here she was, faced with the thing accomplished, done with. What cure for a soul grown corpulent?

Mona sought no cure. She accepted, as she accepted everything else, the fact of Shane's squab soul. Life had gone to pieces in her hands, and the sight of the wreckage left her curiously unaffected. Dickie's death, if it had been revealing had been also benumbing, so that things now simply did not

hurt her. It scarcely seemed possible that she would ever feel anything again. Maurya, all her sons drowned, had nothing left to fear. "There isn't anything more the sea can do to me." So to Mona, it seemed, with life. There wasn't anything more life could do to her. . . . In one sense, the old Mona, no more than the old Shane, was there at all, or perhaps she merely slept. Those were the only really painful thoughts that came to her, these closing days of twenty-one, that she was asleep, that some day she might wake up.

Their public life was a much more successful affair than the life they lived in private. There was, too, a good deal more of it. Their public manners were beautiful and unfailing. Mona went to receptions, to dinners, to the play; she smiled, talked, wore beautiful clothes and felt nothing. She entertained Shane's guests—she never saw them as hers, never admitted them to any degree of intimacy; she was charming, gracious, she talked and was talked to. It never, for Mona, amounted to anything else.

"Well, *you've* got a lot to say, haven't you?" Shane grumbled one day at a *tête-à-tête* lunch. "I'm damned if I can understand why people are always telling me what a good conversationalist you are."

Mona smiled.

"They mean, What good conversationalists *they* are," she said. "The people who want to talk always say that about anyone who'll listen."

It seemed to Mona that she never did anything but listen. Sometimes she listened to what other people said; sometimes to herself, and sometimes to the dreadful silence in her heart.

"Beautiful, but cold," people said of her, when they were not calling her a good conversationalist. Nobody suspected that she was unhappy, unless, indeed, it were Maud Norman, too busy, as usual, to see much of her niece, but clearly of the opinion, when she did, that she was living on her nerves. And whilst Eve accounted for her listlessness by the fact of Dickie's death and acknowledged it by no more than a passing benediction upon "all those other things" in Mona's life which

kept her mind from a painful subject, Maud only saw that though she had smothered her wound beneath the trappings of her social existence, it still bled copiously—the more copiously, perhaps, that it might bleed thus in secret. For the rest, that pale air of detachment, which Mona wore like a cloak covering all that was beneath, deceived everybody, even Greta, who was in danger, these days, of seeing nothing about her women friends save that they had or had not the man they wanted. Mona *had*. It had always been Shane Mona had wanted. Well, she had got him—that must count for something, Greta thought. With her small son at school, immersed in games and new companionships, it was her own future, not Mona's, at which she was looking a little wistfully. For Harry Blunsdon, who had not come home in the summer, after all, was definitely expected during the next, and Mark, it was so obvious, was wearier than ever of his shipping office.

“If Harry asks him he'll go,” Greta said to Mona. “I keep telling myself that he *is* going—that it's all definitely fixed. And then it's so awful because there isn't anything left and I begin trying to believe that something will happen, that he won't go after all.”

Mona was aware that Greta came to her because she wanted someone to say things of that kind to, but she never came with Mark, who, indeed, visited his sister but seldom, not liking the company of the “booky.” Mark believed that people who wrote should live on the mountain-top and never come down from it and found it disconcerting to come upon them in his sister's drawing-room, or standing about on a Thursday evening demolishing ices or trifle. And on those occasions when he arrived to find Mona alone, it was she, not Mark, who talked of Greta. Mark, as quiet and self-contained as ever, still gave you the impression of one engaged in working out the problem of existence and getting amazingly contradictory answers. The shipping office, however, despite Greta's assertion, was not dull: “anything but.” It was tantalising, endlessly unrolling before him a coloured map of the universe. Oh, he could have better endured it if it had been what Greta

thought it—simply dull. Remained, for Mark, a daub of colour on the horizon—thoughts of Harry Blunsdon and Canada. Harry and Canada, not Greta; not Greta at all. Mona really did not see where Greta came in. She said: "She's awfully fond of you, Mark."

"Well, I'm fond of her, too," Mark frowned. "But what's the use? You know Mardinor: you must see he isn't going to budge."

"I don't think he is."

"Well, then. . . . That's that. I'm no bloomin' romantic, like you. All for love and the world well lost. Don't believe it. I agree with mother that life is a good deal more than love, and it ain't many of mother's blessed aphorisms I cotton to. But she's right here. There's always a time when you can get out."

"And you propose to get out . . . if Harry comes over this summer and gives you a chance?"

"That's about it."

"It'll be very hard on Greta."

"It'll be a jolly sight harder on her if I go on staying here, and Mardinor goes on standing in the way. What's the good of it, anyway? We could never get married, and the other thing doesn't appeal to me, even though it *is* in the family."

She stared at him, her face white. Mark could not possibly *know*. . . .

"In the family?" she asked.

"Well, father . . . Aunt Beth. Oh, I'm not judging them. They had their own standards. I'm not any better than they are—rather not. My morals, I mean. It's only that I couldn't feel comfortable that way—and I suppose they could. I don't know. But, anyway, I'd always see Mardinor standing there between us, and it'd be Hell. I just couldn't stand it. Could *you* stand it—if there were somebody else, some other woman, between you and Shane? . . . Look at it for yourself."

Mona looked at it for herself, and the sight bereft her utterly of words. "There you are!" said Mark. "What's the use of talking? Much better get out while you can."

Mona stopped looking at the picture Mark had invited her to look at. "Mightn't you, perhaps, be sorry afterwards?"

"Probably—for a bit. It wouldn't last."

"How terribly positive you are."

"Well, there are a few things in life even I can be dogmatic about."

"And this is one of them—that life is more than love?"

"Absolutely."

"I don't agree with you."

"That's because you're an incurable romantic."

Mona laughed.

"A romantic? I? My dear boy, I haven't an illusion left."

Mark grinned.

"Think so?" he said. "You do very nicely without. I suppose you've done rather well for yourself, haven't you? Mother thinks so. . . . Awful pity about the kidlet, of course. . . . Do you know, I'd never have believed Shane had it in him. Did *you* ever think he'd turn out like this?"

"No," said Mona thoughtfully, "I couldn't *really* have thought it. By the way, is Harry coming over next summer?"

"Rather. July, probably."

"That's really fixed, is it?"

"I believe so. By the way, how's Shane's play getting on? What's it about?"

"I don't know. It's a comedy. Mann approached him. It seems people will write farces under the impression they're turning out comedies. Mann seemed to think Shane was the man to avoid this pitfall—on the strength, apparently, of his last book."

"Does he read it aloud?"

"Not to me."

"I thought authors always read their stuff to their wives?"

"They do. We usually represent 'the average reader,' but even the most successful writers realise that their own particular 'average reader' needs a rest occasionally."

But it was rapidly approaching Christmas before Mona presented Shane with the fact of her overpowering need of a very decided rest indeed.

"But what's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You look pretty much the same."

"So much success is fatiguing. I want an opportunity of forgetting how terribly successful we are."

"Is this a knock at my Thursday evenings?"

"I don't think so. In any case, they're so informal you don't really require a hostess."

She hated Shane's Thursday evenings, to which only Those Who Mattered came.

"I'm not very useful," she said.

"You look nice."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, yes, ornamental."

"Is it so difficult to please me?"

She said, utterly without passion of any sort: "As though it matters a tuppenny damn whether I come or not! I shan't make any difference whatever to the evening."

"What on earth is the matter with you?" said Shane.

"I've told you. I'm tired."

"Of what?"

Again that eloquent movement of her shoulders.

"I don't know. . . . Perhaps of being an ornament to your existence, instead of part of the structure."

"Whose fault is it that you aren't, if you aren't?"

"Ours," she said briefly.

The subject dropped, but on the following Thursday she did not come down, and on the Thursday after that she thought Shane looked a little surprised when, after dinner, she announced her intention of putting in an appearance.

"But I thought you'd decided to give Thursdays a rest?"

"I had a rest last week."

"But really, the evening went quite well. . . ."

"Without me?" She smiled. "I knew it would. All the same, I think I'll put in an appearance this week."

"Just as you please, of course."

Later, crossing the hall, she came upon Shane at the telephone, heard his irritable voice. "What? . . . No, Mrs. McNaughten. Dining out? . . . Oh, no, thank you. No message." He replaced the receiver, followed Mona into the

room where the evening's refreshments were spread, and mixed himself a whisky and soda. He drank it at a draught, putting the glass down with a little jerk. "I say, you look very pale . . ." he said, his eyes upon his wife, who was staring at him.

"Perhaps it's the result of seeing you drink three whiskies and sodas in less than two hours," she said. "Is it a new habit, or have I merely not observed it before?"

"Newish. We don't, as a family, get really interested in drink until we arrive at the thirties. Our youth is quite abnormally sober. I remember my father pointing that out once to my mother."

"You're losing no time," said Mona. Shane had only recently passed his thirtieth birthday. She looked a little scornful.

"You look as though one wouldn't hurt *you*," Shane said.

"The smell of whisky wouldn't go with my frock, thanks very much." She picked up a book and went out of the room.

At half-past eight the first guests arrived, and at nine o'clock the Past, clad in brilliant orange, slashed with black, sailed gracefully into the room in the wake of tubby little Ruth McNaughten, who wobbled up to Mona with both hands extended, looking ludicrously like a Toby jug with a handle too many. "My dear," she said, "I'm sure you won't mind, but I've brought an old friend of your husband's along . . . a Miss Ramsden. Patricia, darling, *do* you and Mrs. Mostyn know each other? I always find it hard to remember, in our set, whether people know the wives as well as the husbands. Mona, darling, you look ravishing."

Mona, looking "ravishing," disentangled herself from Mrs. McNaughten's handclasp and bowed to the orange and black Past that had elected to come in a hat.

"Oh, yes," said Mona, "Mrs. Desmond and I are old friends," and took in details of that hat—of the picture variety, with a long sweeping feather, a little incongruous on that obviously bobbed head. Of the orange and black frock she only saw that there was certainly not too much.

"Such years since we met," said Patricia. "How clever of you to remember my married name!"

"And how *horrid!*" said Mona, with her sweet artificial smile that so many men took for the real thing. She could feel Shane's eyes upon her across the room. "Let me introduce you," she said. "I don't know if you've met. . . ."

Patricia, Shane saw, was definitely passed on.

Mona, with only the faintest touch of colour in her face, had resumed her conversation with a young man who looked as though he thought her the most beautiful creature in the world—as he probably did. "Somebody ought to be engaged to say shocking things to you all day," Shane said to her once. "You look so lovely when you blush, and you do it so seldom."

This particular blush—so faint that it was the merest touch of carmine on the creamy whiteness of her quiet face—remained there all the evening and was still there when the last guest had departed, and Shane came into the room in which she was standing before the fire, and mixed himself another whisky and soda.

"Shane!" she said.

"Hello!"

"Did you know Mrs. McNaughten was going to bring Mrs. Desmond here this evening?"

"Know? How should I know? After all we keep open evening, we expect anybody to bring anybody, and Ruth did say Patricia was coming to town. . . ."

She noted the "Patricia" with a little narrowing of her straight dark gaze.

"You *did* know," she said quietly. "You didn't expect me to come down. . . . That was rather rash of you."

"Are you saying I deliberately invited Patricia here, without telling you?"

"By no means. Ruth McNaughten did the inviting, and you hadn't the moral courage to put her off. You counted on my having a week or two upstairs. I begin to see why you were so anxious I should prolong my 'rest' and why you were telephoning Ruth after dinner. Oh, don't trouble to deny it. But you should have warned me."

"Well, you know how vague Ruth is. . . . Besides, it wasn't even certain that Patricia was coming to town."

Mona smiled—perhaps at the idea of the word “vague” as applied to Ruth McNaughten. She said: “It was a little . . . startling to see the Past walk so unexpectedly into one’s drawing-room.”

Shane tossed off his whisky and soda with a little laugh. “Possibly,” he said, “but then we can’t all be as lucky as you!”

“Lucky? As I?”

Shane put down his glass so carelessly that it fell to the floor and was smashed.

“Well, it isn’t everybody,” he said, his eyes on the mess on the floor, “whose Past has the good taste to shuffle off this mortal coil.”

For a second Mona stared at him as though trying to make herself believe she had heard aright; then, whilst Shane stood there kicking the broken glass together, she walked past him and out of the room.

Half an hour later he came upstairs and knocked at her door. Mona was in bed: the lights out. Shane switched them on and came and leaned over the foot of the bed rail.

“Sorry,” he said, “but you shouldn’t have been so la-de-dah about it. After all, old girl, you haven’t been altogether saintly yourself.”

His apology. His idea of an apology. Horrible. Even allowing for the whiskies and sodas, the most horrible thing that had happened to her.

“I’m very tired,” she said. “Will you please . . . go?”

“But look here, old girl——”

“Oh, please go. . . .”

He went.

Oh fool, to think that life had done with her—that there really was not anything left which could hurt her. . . . Life was ambushed and implacable. Ambushed and implacable it would be to the end.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN the days that immediately followed, the chasm between them yawned so prodigiously that instinctively they both turned to throw some sort of bridge across it. For even when Mona had gone back to the studio and her work to escape the implications of those two deadly sentences, she was aware that what troubled her most was not those things said, not, even, Patricia's coming, but the moral cowardice of Shane which had made it possible. Never for a single moment did she believe that Shane had wanted her to come, but he simply had not had the courage to prevent it. Most dismally, too, since it was not possible to imagine Patricia allowing herself to be dragged willy-nilly at Ruth McNaughten's very French heels, Mona was left with the reflection that Patricia must have expected the visit to be plain-sailing. And yet what on earth could have induced her to suppose that Shane had wanted her to come, that her presence in his wife's drawing-room could be anything at all but an offence? It was not possible that Shane. . .

Then Shane, looking back across the chasm, said: "Don't think I've been seeing a lot of Patricia . . . I met her back in July at Ruth's."

"Not since July?"

He was extraordinarily grateful to her for putting it like that. "Not once, I swear that's true, Mona. I suppose you don't believe me?"

"Oh, yes," said Mona and reflected that she was becoming uncannily skilful in detecting Shane's truths from his lies. "All the same, Patricia Desmond used not to be so devastatingly wanting in tact. She must *know* that I know. . . ."

Then she saw by Shane's face that she did not—that Shane had never told her.

"What chance have I ever had?" he defended himself. "Until that afternoon at Ruth's I hadn't seen her since I went to France . . . years ago. She went back to Desmond soon after I got out there. You don't imagine I could sit in Ruth's hideous drawing-room and solemnly warn her off our premises, do you?"

No, Mona did not expect that. But he ought to have got at Ruth somehow, and she smiled crookedly at the thought that the Shane who had made that confession to her was not the Shane who had allowed this contretemps to occur, and to occur without one word of warning. She felt as though she had been living with someone who had kept something dangerous in a cage and had never even warned her to keep away from the bars. Presently, she began to understand that the very last thing Patricia had expected was that Shane should have made that confession. Well, the Shane of to-day *would not* have made it. . . .

But the building operations went steadily onwards, though the bridge was remarkable, perhaps, for nothing very much save the really arduous effort that went into it. Certainly Shane's contribution was distinct and not to be ignored. His play had been accepted and was shortly going into rehearsal—a fact which, in itself, seemed to him an all-sufficing reason why Mona should re-establish him in her favour. It was simply preposterous to Shane Mostyn that his marriage should be the least successful thing about him; as preposterous as the fact that Mona should think his success the least successful thing about him. Mona's ideas about worldly achievement were childish and aggravating; they explained, to some extent—and to Shane—why he and Mona had made "such a hash of things." They had not started fair. Those two deadly sentences—the thing said and the "apology" for it—showed how frequently that idea of an unfair start was intruding itself upon Shane's mind. It ought not to be possible for a man to be in a position to say a thing like that about his wife, and though there was another Shane who had moments of relief because it was, he did for the most part bitterly regret what he called Mona's unseemly desire for Absolute Truth. More

than all else he knew now he resented that evening when she had thrust it naked and hideous before his eyes and sometimes it seemed to him that she had been doing it ever since—telling him something he did not want to hear—about herself, himself, *them*, something he would so much rather not have heard. And why? Left to himself he would never have imagined a thing like that about Mona (nobody would): his jealousy, he believed, would have stopped far short of anything so hopelessly incredible. Was it that one found absolution in confession? He pondered that, rejecting it. One's sins should be harder than that, undesirous, so to speak, of a moral backing. And one should be able to forget them. The men and women he met nowadays—and Judy had told him once that in her opinion he moved in a most unsavoury set—were certainly unhaunted by any sins of theirs, and unabashed, even when they achieved publicity and became "news" for the man in the street.

Shane's rehearsals, early in 'twenty-two, distracted his mind from these unprofitable speculations. The rehearsals, surely, were worse than anything which could possibly befall him, for at them his belief in himself petered out most dismally. His play, seen from the dim and hollanded stalls, affected him darkly with horror. Nothing was right: not the dialogue, the situations or the players. The producer was evidently a born fool, who did not understand in the very least what the play was about, and how it should be presented, though Shane, appealed to there in his dim corner, was not particularly helpful, doing little beyond taking his pipe out of his mouth, saying, "God knows . . . God knows!" and sometimes getting up out of his seat and walking about the gangways or seizing his hat and rushing out into the street.

"It's appalling," he told Mona, "simply appalling. It plays like the work of a drivelling idiot. And my heroine! Good God, my heroine! The girl's like a stick . . . a lump of lead. She's awful. And Mann will have it she's *the* girl for the part. I tell you, Mona, the thing's going to be a frost. I'm in a blue funk about it."

He obviously was, and Mona rather liked him that way. He

came to her for reassurance in the way he used—how long ago now it seemed!—so that there were times, seeing him moving about with that sense of the sword of public failure about to drop upon his neck, when she almost wished it might! There was an astringent quality about failure that success seemed utterly to lack, and she still believed, paradoxically, that failure was the one thing which could really save them, by which that bridge across the chasm might be made sufficient to the demands of life.

But Shane's play did not fail. It succeeded quite ridiculously and Mona detested it. But more than all else she detested the people who applauded it. When the performance on the first night was over—together with the mutual compliments of certain black-coated gentlemen who had collected themselves upon the stage—and she and Shane were on the way home, Mona was very quiet, a fact mercifully hidden from Shane at first by his own exuberant flow of words. Her job, obviously, once again was to listen. She had no objection to doing that: so long as he did not ask her, point-blank, what she thought of his play she was prepared to listen all night. Then suddenly, of course, he did ask. Had she liked it? What was her honest opinion?

"You do really *want* my honest opinion?"

He said "Of course" in the way people do when they mean "Of course not." She said: "If you'd made a farce of it, I think I should have found it more amusing."

"A farce? Why?"

"Because you don't expect a farce to have any relationship to life."

"You didn't like my play because it was too much like life?"

"No, because it wasn't."

"Darling, are you being witty?"

She smiled. "No, I do not compete."

"Then do you mind being explicit?"

"It isn't easy. What I mean is that that awful family in a farce would have been all right. Nobody would have taken it seriously. They'd have known you didn't mean it: but in

the play as you wrote it they were all perfectly certain that you did."

"Well?"

"Only that you *oughtn't* to have meant it. You call your man a 'Little Clerk,' but you make somebody say that his salary was two hundred and fifty a year, and the period is pre-war, so you might just as well have said he was a dentist. And that's *my* class, you know, Shane, *ours*."

Shane laughed as though he found that a remarkably good joke.

"You're not going to tell me your family grubbed along on two hundred and fifty a year?"

"No, because my father happened to have a public appointment and a private income. But his partner had neither. He couldn't have knocked up more than three hundred. And neither he nor his family were like your awful people. . . . Besides, only a year ago we ourselves were living on less than that, *post-war*."

"And a miserable existence it was!"

"I wasn't miserable. I was very happy, most of the time. But at any rate, our manners were nice. You won't allege that we dropped our aitches and picked them up again in such hopeless places—and I don't remember that we ate with our knives or harangued visitors with our forks."

"We hadn't been at it long enough. Twenty years of that and I might have been doing far worse. It isn't a question of class at all—it's a question of money. You *can't* live decently on an income like that. . . . And in any case, my dear, I was writing a play, creating an atmosphere."

"I wish you hadn't written that *sort* of play, nor created quite that atmosphere. It looks so horribly like snobbery . . . forgetting so easily, I mean, what your own class is really like."

Shane frowned.

"You must have had a thoroughly unpleasant evening," he said.

"Instructive," said Mona.

"What did it teach you, other than that I am a snob?"

"That you are lots cleverer even than I had supposed. Will that do?" she smiled. "And even though I think you oughtn't to have touched your idea with a barge-pole (she sighed to remember that the Shane she had married would not have touched it even with a very long barge-pole) nobody to-night seemed to agree with me. Neither will the critics. *I* can't stop your play being a success, you know."

"But you do love, don't you, taking the wind out of my sails? You're becoming an expert in the art of deflation."

"I don't mean to do any deflating. Sorry, but you did ask for my 'honest' opinion."

Shane smiled, a little one-sidedly, as though he had not expected there to be quite so much of it.

"You don't deserve it," he said, "but if *Barriers* is really a success, I'll buy you a car."

"Me? A car? But I really don't want one. I like walking . . . and when I don't, there's always a taxi."

"But suppose *I* want a car?"

"Oh, that's a different matter; but you said you were buying *me* a car, you know."

"Well, *us*, then."

Mona smiled.

She went next afternoon and endured the play again—this time from the pit, whose occupants certainly enjoyed it quite as much as had the stalls. So Mona gave it up. Evidently people liked hearing themselves maligned or did not mind if it was wittily done. There was no cheapness, no vulgarity, no generalisation the public would not swallow if you dressed it up as an epigram. Why was she grumbling at Shane for giving the public what it liked; for being what the bulk of people were so unashamedly? She smiled at the vision that even yet remained in her mind, of a young girl awaiting Shane's return from a continental holiday; counting the days with a feverish excitement, not because she fancied herself in love with him, but because he alone of all the people she knew in those difficult days of August, nineteen-fourteen, "spoke her language." And lo, when he came he did not speak it. Even as early as all that she had been wrong about Shane.

A week or so later, she left him with his success and went off to week-end at Fiveways. Jeremy Bentley, ninety-five, a little hard of hearing, apt at times to call Mona "Huldah" and not quite clear in his own mind about the death of his great-grandchild, was growing a little tiresome. Judy, indeed, could not be coaxed to spend any portion of her time and vitality upon him: she believed the exceedingly elderly should be painlessly dispatched, and found something at once ridiculous and disgusting in advanced old age. But to Mona it was infinitely pathetic. She saw Jeremy Bentley as an old old man and smiled at her mother's legends concerning him. A long journey. And at the end what? Her mother was always so certain he had secured most of the things he wanted from life, but Mona wondered just what exactly those things had been. She could never discover. What had he wanted? What, if it came to that, did *any* of them want?

It was a rather tired-looking Mona who came back on Monday afternoon, met her mother at Victoria and went shopping until half-past four, when they walked down to the Bond Street tea-shop she and Shane had discovered in those first days of their marriage.

And there, in the familiar corner by the window sat Shane and Patricia, so deep in conversation that neither of them looked up until Mona sauntered up to their table, laid a hand upon her husband's shoulder and nodded affably to Patricia.

"Sit here, Mrs. Mostyn," said that young woman, indicating the seat at her side. Mona sat down in it, took off her furs, and leaned forward with her elbows on the table, her casual untroubled glance roaming about the room, whilst Shane ordered more tea and fresh bread-and-butter and scones. Eve was a little nonplussed by the look on Shane's face of dogged reserve which she had not expected to see and which reminded her of the days when Shane had first brought Patricia to Marne House and she had so strenuously and so obviously disapproved of her. "Shane keeping his end up." Eve remembered that old phrase of Judy's.

Mona began talking to Patricia. Not a trace of colour in her pale face. No tremor in her voice. And that steady gaze!

Perhaps, though, it was easier to look at Patricia than at Shane. Eve had not seen that one quick guarded look Mona had flung across at Shane under cover of her casual survey of the room, nor the secret, intimate shock of what she had seen reflected for an instant in her own face as she sat there cutting her toasted scone into four neat pieces.

Patricia was doing most of the talking. Eve, listening indifferently, fell to noticing Patricia's rings, wondered how much they cost and how she dared—in these days of unemployment—go about in them. "I suppose Desmond must be rich; made money out of the war, I expect. . . . That would explain, of course, why she went back to him. . . ." Beginning to perceive that it was no easier than it had ever been to think generously of Patricia, she drank up her tea in a hurry and in one of those rare intervals not filled by the sound of that young woman's voice, inquired of Patricia if she had any intention of going back to America.

"I'd love to," said Patricia, "but unfortunately there's a reason why, just at present, I can't possibly leave England."

"Ruth McNaughten told me the other day that you have a daughter," said Mona.

(Surely not, thought Eve. Patricia Desmond with a child of her own. How absurd! But true, apparently.)

"Yes," Patricia was saying, "but she's not the reason. She's at school. My husband thinks she oughtn't to be. He believes in 'lessons at mother's knee'—and yet he wouldn't approve of one of the things I'd be likely to teach her!"

(How like Patricia, Eve thought. Just the sort of unnecessary thing she would be sure to say!)

"I had two years of her once . . . two whole years to myself. They nearly killed me. I find unrelieved conversation with a child so fearfully tiring. It's positively idiotic the way grown-ups are expected to live in the same world as children. I'm sure Mrs. Norman agrees with me."

Mrs. Norman did. Mrs. Norman reflected that this was the first time she had agreed with anything Patricia Desmond had ever said. She was pleased that she had remembered her married name, considering Patricia to be the sort of woman who

required to have the fact of her marriage kept constantly in front of her.

Presently Mona twisted her black furs about her slender throat, shook hands with Patricia and put a hand upon Shane's shoulder. "I'm going home, via Marne House," she said. "Will you collect me there?"

Outside, she and Eve climbed on to a bus and found that they had a good deal of it to themselves.

"I thought," said Eve presently, "that you said Shane didn't *see* that young woman nowadays?"

"No, I said the affair between them was finished."

"Hair-splitting," said Eve. "The one inferred the other. Extraordinary creature she is! How old's the daughter?"

"Ten, so Ruth says. She was born before Patricia was eighteen. Poor Patricia."

Eve looked very scornful. "Why poor? If ever a woman had a good time. . . ."

"Oh, because she married before she knew the truth about herself. Patricia should be a man's mistress, not his wife. Some men want one and some the other—and some want both. Well, unfortunately for Patricia, Desmond wanted a *wife*. Funny that men can't *see*. Mardinor couldn't. Now, Desmond would have been perfectly happy with Greta." She laughed a little and glanced at her mother, who, obviously, was not seeing the peculiar humour of the situation at all. "My dear child! This is such a silly way to talk!"

"A bit obvious, but not silly," said Mona. "Women like Patricia ought never to be saddled with a home and babies. They don't want either. And they don't want a husband. They want an Occasional Man. Oh, don't look so shocked. *Men* don't believe there are such women—except bad ones, but we *know*. Do let us look at the world for ourselves, as though we've never heard a masculine opinion about it. Patricia isn't bad. She isn't vicious. She simply can't stand the life of a wife, the sort of life Desmond wanted her to live, so she cleared out. Then he never left her alone until she went back. She said she was sorry for him—and I suppose she thought the money would make a difference."

"And hasn't it?"

"Not enough, anyway, according to Ruth. You heard her say she's sent the child away to school. Well, there's that . . . and Desmond wants a son."

"Short-sighted of him, I agree, to marry a woman like Patricia."

"And there are plenty of men who'd appreciate her type . . . men, I mean, who do want a legal mistress and not a wife, and who wouldn't cry for babies."

"Nonsense, my dear. All men want babies."

"You're quite wrong, darling," said Mona.

"If you're thinking of Reuben Mardinor . . ."

"I'm not."

She sat silent, apparently lost in contemplation of the world of wind and sun and quivering leaves that went on just over the railings of London's park. Her face was singularly free from hint of trouble; its straight profile delicately outlined against the soft black ridge of her furs. Eve, who valued beauty in her daughters less, perhaps, than did any other woman in the world, was touched this afternoon by the real loveliness of that quiet figure at her side. She thought: "I do hope she's not going to be idiotic about it. All this silly talk. . . . She ought to make Shane understand from the beginning that she isn't going to stand it. She ought *not* to—no woman ought." Her mouth hardened with recollection. She was angry with Shane, but she was also, if unconsciously, a little obliged to him. We are never too grateful to people for proving themselves better than we had supposed, and Eve had never really believed that they had heard the last of Patricia, any more than years ago she had believed . . . Her obligation to Shane showed suddenly twofold; for if Shane was going to be as blatant as all this about it, even Mona must see for herself what the circumstances were.

She certainly did not seem to be seeing them very clearly this afternoon. A little sharply, Eve said: "My dear child, if you intend to put up with things!" That surely would make her angry, break up the quiet brooding of that beautiful face.

It did not. It did not do anything of the sort. It only drew down the dark line of her brows in a diminutive frown.

"Put up with things? I?" She shook her head. She smiled. "Mother, darling, can't you see that it's *Shane* just now who's putting up with things? Couldn't you see how he *hated* this afternoon?"

"Hated being discovered, you mean? Naturally."

Mona's smiling deepened.

"No," she said. "*That* wasn't what he minded. He minded the *reason* why he was there."

"Which was?"

"I don't know . . ."

Neither, she might have added, did she very much care. For just one moment in that little tea-shop she had caught a glimpse of the Shane whose soul had not been squab—and for that one interval of time she was so grateful that nothing else mattered just then, not even the doubt which surged into her mind when Eve said, "How can you be sure that Shane and Mrs. Desmond, that the old affair . . ."

"I can't," said Mona. But she wondered. *Was* that it? Was it only that he had been caught doing the thing he had strenuously denied? She did not believe it: was sure there was more behind it than that. The days when Shane's intrigue with Patricia went to the accompaniment of teas were over. If he *were* seeing Patricia again it was across no tea-table. "If we had discovered him dining at the Vasavour," she thought, "there might be something in the intrigue idea. That look might just have meant 'Oh, damn!' He would have minded—but differently. To-day that look on Shane's face had nothing at all to do with her unexpected appearance. *It had been there all the time.* I just happened to walk in and see it, before he had time to cover it up. . . ."

But when she laboured to clothe this conviction in words, Eve thought she was merely being clever and "difficult." Eve would certainly not have been guilty of drawing such unreasonable deductions from such obvious premises. "All this is completely beyond me," she said, and added, "I certainly think you ought to have it out with Shane at once."

And once again the conversation flagged. It was not easy to talk to somebody who looked so far away that you did not really believe she would hear a word you said. Besides, Eve felt sure, somehow, that Mona was not going to "have it out with Shane."

She sat there turning over in her mind this queer lack of "proper pride" in a daughter of hers. She could not understand how such a thing could possibly have happened.

An hour later Shane came into the studio and hung up his hat. He looked pale, but his manner was cheery. He took Mona in his arms and held her there. Only when he released her did she remember that he had not kissed her, that he had merely allowed her to kiss him. Yet she had not kissed him like that for months, nor wanted him so to kiss her.

"Sorry I'm so late," he said. "I went round to the Haymarket and got tickets for the show there. You needn't go home to dress. Judy can lend you a cloak, can't she?"

She stared at him.

"A theatre? We're going to a theatre?"

"Why not? I want cheering up. I've had a beastly afternoon."

She thought: "We go to a theatre because he can't endure an evening with me. He's afraid of a *tête-à-tête*—afraid that I may ask questions." She understood that he was not going to tell her why he needed "cheering up," why his afternoon had been "beastly." . . . He was not going to tell her anything at all. She went and sat down on a tuffit near the fire, feeling impotent and afraid.

"Why won't you tell me what is the matter?" she said.

"Who says there's anything the matter?"

She smiled.

"Shane, we don't have to pretend to each other, do we?"

Shane said nothing. She tried again.

"There's something worrying you. You hide it very well, but not quite well enough. . . . If you'd tell me what it is . . ."

"I *can't* tell you what it is."

"Are there really things we can't tell each other? . . . I told you something once I'd have given the world not to have had to tell you."

"That's just it," Shane cried out. "I'm sick of sitting here listening to our beastly mutual confessions. This room's full of them. . . ."

She said nothing to that. She sat quite still gazing into the fire. But she felt as though her heart was being very slowly cut in two. The pain of it was still there when he drew her reluctantly into his arms and kissed her, and when she went off to borrow a cloak of Judy's, and when she came back.

All the way to the theatre she was appalled by the complete breakdown of that hastily-flung bridge. The distance between them gaped afresh and every time she glanced, in the darkened theatre, at Shane's face, she felt again impotent and stunned.

"It's spoilt, all spoilt," she thought, but she did not know why it was spoiled, nor who had spoiled it.

CHAPTER NINE

PATRICIA'S voice on the telephone.

"Will you see me if I come along this afternoon? Or would you rather come here? I'm at Ruth's. No, no, I particularly *don't* want to see your husband. I'm to come to you? At three, then, punctually. Good-bye."

When Mona had hung up the receiver it seemed to her that she had known this was going to happen—that for three whole days she had been sitting there waiting for it. And Patricia, walking, exquisitely clad, into her drawing-room, Patricia sitting down and leisurely taking off her gloves, was but an actualisation of something seen already in a dream. Watching her, Mona was aware that now she would know what Shane had refused to tell her, what she knew was somehow concerned with him and with Patricia; but even as she marshalled her forces to keep that knowledge of Shane's refusal from this exquisitely-dressed and perfectly-composed young woman she saw that it couldn't be done. For though her self-possession was equal to Patricia's "Of course you can guess what it is I've come about," it went instantly to pieces over her casual "Shane has told you, of course, about my husband's action." It was so obvious that he hadn't. "But why ever not?" Patricia wanted to know. "You've got to be told, some time. Besides, he promised. . . . My husband is suing for divorce—the case will come on for hearing very soon . . . early in the summer."

Mona looked rather as if you had told her that an aeroplane would shortly descend at her front door and that the pilot would be dropping in to tea. "I see," she said politely, "but how does this affect me?"

"Really," said Patricia, "this is too beastly of Shane. Of course I came on the assumption that you knew. I thought Shane told you everything?"

"Not quite, perhaps," said Mona and waited. Patricia said again, "Beastly of Shane, perfectly beastly," and then, "My dear child, can't you *guess*?" She came devastatingly to the point. "Shane is being cited as co-respondent."

No colour came into Mona's pale face, but something that had been there before went out suddenly. It was like removing the light from behind a mask of alabaster. She said quietly: "You say Shane is aware of this?"

"It was what we were talking about on Monday in that tea-shop."

The light behind the white mask came back with the sudden memory of Shane kicking at a little heap of broken glass at his feet. "We can't all be as lucky as you. . . . It isn't everybody whose Past . . ." Oh, no, Time could not take so mean a revenge as that—Time and Fate that had been so kind to her. The pale light deepened, glowed and burned steadily. "Surely not at this time of day," she said. "Your husband cannot possibly be taking action for something which happened six or seven years ago?"

"He isn't," said Patricia, with some show of impatience. "This hasn't anything whatever to do with anything that happened six or seven years ago. Do try to understand. It's a matter of last year—last summer. . . . And Shane is behaving like a fool. He has actually entered his defence."

"Of course. You can't expect him to submit tamely—to behave as though it's *true*!"

Patricia looked at her.

"But it *is* true," she said.

It seemed a very long while before Mona spoke.

"I don't understand," she said at length, "if it is true, why does Shane enter a defence?"

"Because he thinks the other side haven't any proof. He thinks that because we occupied separate rooms . . ."

"I see," said Mona quietly. "What is it exactly that you want me to do?"

"I want you to persuade Shane to drop his defence. He wouldn't listen to me. He meant to lie. I see why now. He wanted to spare you. The only way he can do that is to do nothing—to let the thing go through. They've got all the proof they want. They've got hold of a chambermaid. Shane's building, I suppose, on being able to buy her off. He doesn't know John Desmond."

Mona, struggling still with that terrible sense of having been through all this somewhere before, yet saw with perfect clearness one fact. The last thing Patricia wanted was that Shane should be able to buy off that girl. Her consideration—for Shane, for Mona herself—was a cloak disguising that one truth. "Oh, I hate her, I hate her," thought Mona, and sat there, quiet as an image, her hands in her lap, the light in her face quenched utterly. And Patricia went on.

"He simply can't be allowed to do it. It's too idiotic—it'll only mean a lot of beastliness for you. Get him to see that. Can't you imagine the headlines? The placards? 'Well-known novelist cited as co-respondent, . . . ' Shane Mostyn, D.S.O., in the witness-box,' and whole columns in the papers! We've *got* to get him off it. If he does nothing it'll go through quite quietly . . . and you needn't worry—I shan't expect him to marry me. No more marriages of any sort for me in this world."

Mona looked at her.

"You want to get free. Is that it?"

"To be perfectly frank, I do. I've made two mistakes at least in my life—bad ones. The first was when I married John Desmond, the second when I went back to him. God only knows why I did either."

"But to use Shane! How could you! Were there no other men?"

"It wasn't done with malice aforethought. It just happened that Shane and I met too opportunely. One Friday afternoon it was, last summer at Ruth's, when he was fed up with things because you'd gone back to Devon. He was going down to Brighton of all places—Brighton in *July*! I was on my own that week-end—John was in Paris—and I'd gone to Ruth's

en route for St. Julian's. I told Shane that he'd better make it St. Julian's instead of Brighton—that he'd better come down with me. I wasn't a bit serious. I never thought for a moment he would. I was never more surprised. I meant it to be straight. We both did. . . .”

With her eyes very dark and wide in her pale dim face Mona sat quite still, with something terrible going on inside her. She thought she was going to faint and Patricia must have thought so too for she rose suddenly and opened the window. So that was when it happened. . . . Those days in July whilst she, whilst she and Dickie . . . There weren't any words. She just sat there like an image of stone whilst Patricia struggled with the window and went on with her explanation.

“We signed our own names and had our own rooms. We did mean to be straight. The thing just happened . . .”

The stone image opened its mouth.

“Please spare me the details,” it said.

Patricia finished with the window and came back to her seat.

“Look here, my dear,” she said, “you don't *care*, do you ?”

“About Shane ?”

“I mean, you're not really fond of him ? Of course this sort of thing's beastly for the wife, anyway . . .”

“Did Shane *tell* you I don't care for him ?”

“No. No, of course not. But it's the common impression, you know, that you don't. People are rather sorry for Shane. I mean, they think you haven't much more use for a husband than I have.”

“What *did* Shane say ?”

“To me ? Really I can't remember. Something about your hardly ever being together under the same roof . . . and about the youngster. He was fearfully fed about your going back. Shane and I, you know, always had some sort of attraction for each other, but that's gone, so far as Shane is concerned. It's you he cares for. I was a makeshift. I'm not making any excuse for myself—what's the use ? Besides, I don't really care. But you can take it from me that on Shane's part it

was nothing but pique. . . . All the same, if I'd thought for a moment that you really *cared* . . ."

"Oh," said Mona, and looked wildly round, her hands to her throat as if she were suffocating, "do you mind going?"

Patricia gathered up her gloves and began putting them on. "I'd never have come if I'd thought Shane hadn't told you," she said. "But I don't see what there is to do. I'll do what I can to stop John from going on, but I can't believe I'll have any success. He's discovered too much. P'raps it would be better, after all, to let Shane buy off that girl. Can't we all three get together and discuss it?"

"There isn't anything to discuss," said Mona. She got up and went to the door.

"But if Shane goes on with his defence?"

"He won't. Mrs. Desmond, please. . . . I don't think I can stand any more."

"My dear, I'm most awfully sorry—really I am. This is mistake number three. I made sure you didn't care—that you'd be glad of the evidence. Honestly I did."

"Oh, please, please . . ." said Mona, and stood there holding open the door.

CHAPTER TEN

IN the days that immediately followed Mona turned with sick and weary disgust from the word "divorce" flung at her from all sides—the more so because of that dreadful night and day which had followed Patricia's revelations and Shane's determined lying, when she had wanted nothing but her freedom and had cursed the law which withheld from her what it gave to Patricia's husband. She saw nothing then but the fact that but for Patricia's visit she would never have known the truth—that Shane had meant to lie and lie; to pose, if necessary, as a wronged and victimised man. Always it was not the thing done but his denial of it that hurt: his determination to continue their life together with that lie between them that she could neither understand nor forgive, and her scorn and anger had been an indication of only the barest edge of her suffering, which went on dully and hopelessly long after Shane had taken himself off and the fierce flame of her scornful anger had burned itself out. That accomplished, nothing seemed able to kindle it afresh. Even when John Desmond obtained his decree in June and Shane showed no intention of returning to her, she could not be induced to move. She did not even seem to realise what Shane was doing until Eve—who saw Shane's "desertion" as the one creditable thing in a discreditable business—pointed it out to her.

"If the law on the subject were decent you'd get your divorce automatically upon Desmond's decree. But the law *isn't* decent. It requires you to prove cruelty or desertion. Don't you see that Shane has enough decency left to give you the chance of providing yourself with the secondary ground

without undue fuss or bother? He means you to take it. He wants you to divorce him—probably so that he can marry that wretched Desmond woman.”

“But she doesn’t want to marry him. Patricia wouldn’t care what the convention on the subject is. She said she’d never marry anybody again.”

“She said . . . ! Oh, my dear child, do be sensible! What sort of a life are you going to live like this? A marriage that is no marriage, neither bound nor free.”

“But I shouldn’t feel ‘free’ even if I divorced Shane a thousand times. Mother, it isn’t *easy* to break an intimacy like marriage, to break it in cold blood, I mean.”

It was that cold blood Eve couldn’t understand. Her own was anything but cold.

“But can’t you see,” she said, “that it isn’t the *decree* which breaks a marriage but the thing for which the decree is granted—or should be granted? It is Shane who is responsible for that, not you—Shane who made your life together insupportable.”

“I didn’t find it insupportable,” said Mona quietly, and fled for sanctuary to Fiveways, as she had done in the days of the war.

Jeremy Bentley, not quite clear in his own mind as to what exactly had happened, and inclined to think “that daughter of his” was at the bottom of things, was shown that little paragraph in the paper which announced the crude fact of Shane’s physical unfaithfulness, and said: “Tut, tut, so you ran away from him because of that?”

“No, he ran away from me.”

“Because he couldn’t stand your tongue?”

“I think it was because he couldn’t stand my *face*, grandpa. I didn’t say much, you know. Shane hated to see me miserable.” She smiled a little wanly. “He always wanted me to look like a chorus girl.”

Jeremy laughed. His conversations with Mona were unpunctuated by those irritable “I can’t hear you’s” which so aggravated her mother, because Mona knew what Eve didn’t—that the deaf find no difficulty in hearing the sounds

you make but only in distinguishing them. "And where is the young man now?"

"America. He was to have gone in May, anyway, for a six weeks' lecture tour. We were going together. . . . The only difference is that he went in March instead and without me—and he's stayed nearly six months instead of six weeks."

"Isn't he coming back?"

"I don't know. I haven't inquired."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm a coward, grandpa. I'm so afraid he'll put 'No' down in black and white—which is what mother wants. Any decent man would see, so she says, that my letter was merely the preliminary to divorce proceedings."

"Your mother wants you to get rid of him, eh? And you don't?"

"I don't know *what* I want. I think it is that I don't want to get rid of him for *this*. There are things I don't believe I could forgive even Shane. Cruelty . . . I couldn't forgive that—any sort of cruelty, passive or active, to anybody, anything. You remember Shane's articles on the starving children of Europe before the Famine Fund became respectable? I owe him something for those, you know, grandpa. He gave money to the Fund even in the days when we really couldn't afford it." She smiled. "I could have divorced him quite easily for saying 'Let them starve.' Mother wouldn't understand that. She'd call it divorcing a man for his political opinions."

"H'm . . . m," said Jeremy. "Well, your mother ought to have been divorced long ago for hers. What are you going to do?"

"Drift," said Mona.

"*You* didn't drift," she said to that miniature of John Chalon's that hung over Jeremy's bed. "You got on with things, as though you believed that 'the true success is to labour.' But you must have found that out for yourself, for they couldn't have given you Robert Louis to read when *you* were young. . . ."

Nevertheless, when one's memory wasn't playing one tricks, "drifting" at Fiveways was a pleasant enough occupation. The old house itself, built of grey stone, on whose sunny ledges the house-martins held family and daily conclave, had long ago endeared itself to Mona. From its windows she had seen alike ploughing and reaping in the upland fields, and in those days immediately preceding her marriage, had asked of life nothing better than to live quiet days there with Shane. A small house it was, enclosed in an acre or two of ground, with well-tended flower and lavender beds, the dark spires of three tall yew trees set in stately formation, and a flagged path of flat worn stones dividing an exquisitely-kept lawn. Beyond the garden was a tangle of orchard, and beyond that the open country stretching away over the Surrey hills to the Downs, whose faint ridge on a mistless day was plainly visible.

Here in the garden in mid-June when Mona arrived were syringa and roses to greet her, larkspur and Canterbury bells, and at the side of the path, in a little niche by the wide door, so that you must pass it to enter the house, a huge elder bush, still in flower. There it stood in your way, a white queen at the Masque of Summer.

Mona could not bear the elder bush. She could always hear its creamy fingers tapping at the studio window and Shane's voice as he thrust them away. "Too ghostly, the dead hand. . . . You'd think somebody was trying to get in." Oh, June, hurry up and be gone and take the elder bush with you!

July came and went, and here was August, with soft winds blowing over the upland fields, "and this damned eternal rain," said Jeremy. "Look what it has done to my roses!"—Jeremy's red roses growing high on his southern wall.

Mona smiled, seeing her grandfather as one who had spent his life looking for a really fine summer. "Already," she thought, "he has forgotten last year!"

She was wrong: he merely wanted *her* to forget it. What tenderness there was in Jeremy was for Mona. This young man she had married managed his affairs very clumsily, but *she* liked him. Why should she be bothered to get rid of him

for her mother's scruples? "Damn it, why can't they leave her alone?" he thought savagely.

Mona had been at Fiveways nearly six weeks when Eve, anxious to see how the land lay and how much the old man was "encouraging her in her stupidity," announced her intention of spending a week-end there and succeeded in persuading Mark that it was his duty to accompany her. Nobody expected Judy to show any interest whatsoever in the expedition and yet a couple of days before the Saturday fixed for its departure, she announced her intention of joining it—or, rather, of preceding it. "I'm going down on the Friday evening," she said, "I've arranged it with Aunt Maud, who assures me that the clinic won't have to shut down. But you'll have to cough up my fare. Sorry, but I'm most dreadfully hard up."

Judy walked up from the station with a clouded brow. She had none of her mother's fierce detestation of the country and none of her sister's passionate adoration of it. She took the world as she found it, town and country, and had her mood for either. Certainly the country was healthy, which was distinctly in its favour. You could breathe there, and the clinic had already increased Judy's natural love of places where this physical function could be adequately performed. It happened, too, this afternoon, to be fine, and the country, beneath a quiet sky, looked fresh and clean and acceptable—"like a convalescent patient," thought Judy, with satisfaction. So the clouded brow was evidently not induced by the scenery.

"We didn't expect you, madam," said Jeremy, when she walked briskly through his garden gate and up to the porch where he sat in the hot sun.

"I sent Mrs. Blake a wire. It said, 'Please add me to the party from Friday evening.'"

"But the party doesn't begin until to-morrow, thank God!" said Jeremy. Then Mrs. Blake appeared. Mrs. Blake was Jeremy's latest housekeeper and seemed to know all about things. Moreover, she thought Judy a thoroughly sensible young woman and was genuinely pleased to see her. "It's all right, miss. I've given you the room next to your sister's—"

at the end of the passage. I showed your grandfather the wire as soon as it came, of course."

"You're a wicked old man," Judy told him, "but it isn't you I've come to see—don't flatter yourself. It's Mona. What have you done with her?"

"I won't have you go worrying her."

"I'm not going to worry her."

"Don't tell me—it's what you've all come for."

"I do tell you—and it *isn't* what *I've* come for. What have you done with her?"

"I can't hear a word you say," said Jeremy, "not a single word."

"In the orchard, miss," said Mrs. Blake. "Shall I tell her?"

"I'll go, thanks. Horrid old man, good-bye," and Judy walked off across Jeremy's lawn as though she had a train to catch. Mona was there in the orchard with a book open upon her lap and sketching materials scattered about on the grass at her feet.

"Hallo," she said. "You haven't brought mother, have you?"

"No, I'm merely the advance guard. She comes to-morrow, with Mark."

"And fresh arguments?"

"Are there any?"

"God knows."

"How *are* things?"

Things, said Mona's eloquent shoulders, were what they were.

"Aren't you bored to death down here? Do you see anybody?"

"I don't want to see people. But I'll be glad to see Mark. He never comes."

"He wouldn't have come now if it hadn't been for mother. If you ask me she's afraid to leave him behind. You know Mardinor's behaving abominably. Did you know he was having Mark watched?"

"Yes—so unnecessary."

"Well, it worries mother. She won't have Greta at the house now. I think that's an idiotic policy, but since Harry arrived Mark and he sit in one another's pockets. Mother's actually encouraging the Canada idea now. She'd rather it were Canada than the other thing, I suppose."

"Poor mother!" said Mona, and picking up her sketch-book from the grass, sat there turning over its pages. Judy, watching her, was struck by the shadowy, exhausted look about her that had belonged to the days of the Kensal Rise regime. She took off her hat, with the boyish gesture of the girl who has no coiffeur to consider, and sat there staring at her sister.

"Look here, Mo," she said at length, "I don't feel I ought to tell you, and yet it's what I came for, though I palmed mother off with some quite excellent and quite other reasons."

Mona looked up from her sketch-book and something bright and quivering broke up the look of exhaustion upon her white face.

"It's about Shane," she said. "He's back from New York. You've seen him?"

"Yes." Judy stared down the vista of twisted tree-trunks.

"Oh, Ju!—*when?*"

"A fortnight ago first, then again last Tuesday. The Lord only knows what he's been doing with himself. He looked frightful. Drinks, drugs, I don't know. I told mother. She said something about history repeating itself. Was there something? I was such a kid, I don't remember. . . ."

Mona nodded. "Another woman, drink, drugs. . . . That was over long ago. Go on about Shane. Did he ask after me?"

Even Judy was not quite proof against the entreaty of that simple question. "Why can't we leave her alone?" she thought. "We can't, any of us, stop her liking him. She'll do that whatever he does."

"Judy, did he?"

"Yes."

"Well? What? Judy, tell me."

"Oh, if you were all right . . . and all that."

"Nothing else?"

"That was all, that first time. On Tuesday he asked me if you were going to get rid of him and when you meant to start, and if you hated him. . . ."

"What did you say?"

"I don't remember."

"Judy!"

"I really don't. Neither does he. . . . Look here, Mo, you may as well know the truth. He was too drunk—or too drugged, God knows which—to remember anything. It didn't *matter* what I said, anyway. He was beastly maudlin." She looked disgusted.

"Maudlin?"

"Well, to cry on the public pavement—I ask you. I'm pretty tough, but even I couldn't stand that. I bundled him into a taxi and took him home. The taxi blued in my last seven and six—had to borrow my fare down."

"You took him home? Oh, Judy! Have you got the address?"

"I promised not to give it to you."

"What difference can it possibly make? I can always get at Shane through his publishers. . . . Is he going back to America?"

"I gather America isn't exactly gasping. America, so far as Shane is concerned, seems to have been a fiasco. Half the time he simply didn't appear. His agents, poor dears, ran out of excuses. He cried when he told me about that, too. I couldn't stand it."

Mona looked as though *she* couldn't stand it, either.

"Write the address down for me here," she said, and passed over her sketching-block. "Oh, come *on*, Judy, what's the use? You can't stop me from seeing him if I want to. Neither you nor mother—nor the hosts of hell."

"Oh, all right," said Judy, "if that's it," and scrawled her bold hieroglyphics on the corner of Mona's pencilled sketch of the vista of twisted trunks. Mona looked at them, frowned and said, "Chelsea? what part of Chelsea? The King's Road? Rooms?"

"Shabby ones. His landlady confided to me afterwards that if you asked *her* (I hadn't) the pore gentleman wanted looking after. She understood he was well off. She didn't seem, so far as I could see, to be doing much for him herself. His rooms were horrible."

"But he's got plenty of money?"

"He told me he'd cashed a cheque two days ago, but couldn't remember what he had done with the money. Couldn't say whether it was for twenty pounds or fifty. . . . Mona, did you know Shane had been like this before—in Leipsic? Over some girl violinist. He told me the story about a dozen times and wept quarts. Most interesting. Shane, not the story. That wasn't new. . . ."

"*Mirage?*"

"More or less. He seemed to have forgotten he'd ever made a book of it—he *kept* telling me it. The facts remained the same even if the details didn't. But he told me *one* new thing, anyway. It was Garth Manistre who came to the rescue. Didn't Garth ever tell you?"

"Only that he had induced Shane to write."

"Well, he had a story made to his hand . . ." Judy smiled. "You know mother'll be annoyed with me for telling you all this, but I felt you ought to know. After all, Shane's your husband, thank God, not mine or mother's. I'm for the bathroom. Dinner at seven?"

"Promptly," said Mona.

"Coming?"

"Presently."

It was growing chilly in the orchard: an amber streak was running up across the sky and a gentle wind was rising. Mona sat huddled in her chair until Judy had vanished from sight, then she rose, collected her belongings and walked back to the house.

A quiet Mona came down to dinner, very glad of Judy and Judy's tongue—and of Jeremy's, if it came to that. Judy had a great deal to talk about—men, women, books, the clinic, Judy. . . .

The clinic, so she imparted to them, was not so bad.

"Probably it's true what Aunt Maud says—I've got a neat and tidy mind. I do, rather, like tidying people up. And don't they need it—the women who come to us! If you could only make them all bob their hair you'd be getting somewhere. The time we waste over hair *alone*, at Stephanie House! And it's so funny—they all know St. Paul on the subject. 'If a woman have long hair . . .' I told one of 'em the other day that St. Paul didn't live in the twentieth century. That didn't seem to have occurred to her, but she looked sort of scared when I told her that long hair was only a tyranny of husbands."

"Husbands? Who's talking of husbands?" said Jeremy.
"Not a popular subject, here, at the present time."

"The subject was hair, grandfather. Hair. HAIR. I said that long hair was a tyranny of husbands."

"You'll escape it, never fear," said Jeremy. "Does that woman think we take all night to eat our soup? Ring the bell, my girl."

Judy rang the bell with emphasis.

"By the way, grandpa," she said as she sat down again, "Mother's been adopted again as the Liberal candidate for Bayswater. That'll make *your* hair curl, grandpa."

"What does she say?" Jeremy asked of Mona.

"That mother is standing again for Bayswater, grandfather."

"She won't find anybody to vote for her," said Jeremy, with immense satisfaction. "She didn't get a thousand votes last time."

"I know," put in Judy, "but everybody agreed locally that if she'd been a man she'd have topped the poll."

"If!" said Jeremy.

"Well, anyway, the most unlikely people said she was more capable than either of her male opponents, only—'We can't vote for a woman, of course!' I expect all the weedy youths she could pick up with one hand said that. 'I wouldn't be represented by a woman. No bloody fear!'"

"Tell her I can't hear a word she says," Jeremy directed Mona, who said that perhaps it was just as well.

"Mona, don't you remember mother used to tell us that in

the old Suffrage days it was always the anæmic youths who used to advise her to go home and look after the baby? I suppose Freud would have something to say to that."

"Gabble, gabble, gabble," said Jeremy, "I don't know what it's all about."

"Freud—Sigmund Freud—psycho-analysis."

"I haven't the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance."

Just as Judy began to repair the omission, Mrs. Blake came in with the next dish. "Running about this time yesterday," said Jeremy. He meant the roast duck. "Trying to put us off, I suppose," said Judy, watching Mrs. Blake carve the duck with an amazing dexterity.

Mrs. Blake continued to carve the duck. Nobody spoke. Mrs. Blake finished carving the duck and departed.

"Not much to look at, that woman," said Jeremy, "but she can cook."

Judy looked at him and read from an imaginary newspaper paragraph: "Mr. Bentley, who was the third man in England to use Smith's cultivator, still takes a personal interest in his garden. He remains in full possession of his faculties. His hearing and eyesight are still good, but he has reluctantly relinquished the carving of duck. . . ."

Mona said softly, gazing out through Jeremy's wide-open doors, "What a heavenly night!"

Judy looked at the night.

"So it is. Do you remember that song of Shane's about the moon?"

"Sir Philip Sidney's song? Yes."

"Don't you like your duck, my girl?"

"We were talking about the moon, grandfather."

"What say?"

"We said '*a nice moon*,' grandpa."

"Yes, very," said Jeremy. "Done to a turn. This woman can cook."

Judy's eyes, agonised, signalled to Mona: "Is he doing it on purpose? How do you stand it?" Mona said softly: "It's all right, this does happen occasionally. We shall get back to the moon presently."

They did, via Jeremy's hideous drawing-room and Mrs. Blake's excellent coffee, the tinkle of Jeremy's cracked old piano and Mona's voice softly singing Shane's music, as she sang it every night for Jeremy.

With how slow steps O Moon thou climbst the sky,
How silently, and with how wan a face . . .

Judy, who was generally labelled "unmusical" because she hated the modern sentimental song, adored the Elizabethans. "I don't feel a bit like that about the moon, myself," she said, "but there's something in it. It's real. It isn't just a hotch-potch of me and thee, roses and posies and dew and you. Shane, you know, was wasted as a novelist. There are a lot of novelists. He ought to have gone on setting the Elizabethans to music. Do you remember any of the others?"

Mona remembered them all. With her heart sickening at that casual past tense—as though Shane were dead, dead to them, dead to *her*—she played them over softly, one by one, all Shane's Cycle of Songs from the Elizabethans, whilst the moon climbed up higher in the sky as though to look in the better upon them. Jeremy dozed in his chair.

"You belong to the room," said Judy. "How do you do it?—because the room's hideous and you aren't."

"It's the frock," Mona said and looked down, as she played, at her "period" taffeta of faintest lilac. Judy, too modern to go back to the past even for her frock, was out of the picture in her vivid striped silk and with her thick-standing bobbed hair. "You might be Grandmother Bentley," she told her sister, who smiled.

"Personally, I think I look much more like one of the Ladies of the Town in Mr. Gay's opera," she said, "or Mr. Nigel Playfair's opera, perhaps."

"We took mother to see it," Judy said. "She didn't appreciate it, but thought some of the tunes 'rather nice.' Can you play any of them?"

On Jeremy's tinkling piano Mona began to play, a little

tentatively, what she remembered, her voice rising softly after a while upon Polly and Lucy's lament for the egregious Macheath.

Would I might be hanged,
And I would so, too,
To be hanged with you,
My dear, with you!
No token of love,
Farewell, adieu . . .

Old bones stirred in the chair; Jeremy sat up. "What's this? Something new?" he asked.

"Something old!" said Judy, and would have told him all about Mr. Gay and his opera but for the striking of the clock. "Nine o'clock. Time for bed," he said, and, rising, gathered up his ebony sticks and departed.

"You know he's really wonderful," Judy said. "Do you think he's going on for ever?"

Mona shook her head, but said nothing. Obviously her thoughts were not upon Jeremy Bentley. Her fingers moved still about the keyboard of Jeremy's cracked piano, hunting out a fugitive tune. The tinkle of sweet music followed Judy as she went out to look at the night.

"There's nothing here at all," she called, "but the moonlight. . . ."

"There's nothing here at all," Mona echoed. "Nothing—even with the moonlight, nothing. . . ."

The music ceased. Over Jeremy's old piano the fair head drooped slowly.

The drawing-room, when Judy came through it *en route* for bed, was empty, but a line of light beneath her sister's door betrayed the fact that she was not yet in bed.

"Good night," Judy called.

Mona's voice said, "Good night." But at midnight it spoke again outside Judy's door. "May I come in?"

"If you must," said Judy encouragingly.

Mona came in and sat on the edge of her sister's bed. In

that moonlit room her face was very pale : her loosened hair—that soft, wavy hair of hers, the kind that never grows very long or very thick—hung about her face and neck like a tangle of silver.

“Judy,” she said, “I’m going back to Shane.”

Judy’s roughened head raised itself from its pillow. “Well, you don’t propose to start at this moment, I suppose? Why couldn’t you let me have my sleep out?”

“It’s good practice for you. If you’re going to be a doctor you’ll have to get used to being waked up. You’ll find the new babies a lot more inconsiderate than I am. Sorry, but I had to tell you. I nearly went after dinner to-night, while you were staring at the moon. I could just have caught the last train if I’d got out Mrs. Blake’s bike. I’ll get the first after breakfast to-morrow morning. I want to be gone before mother arrives.”

“I see. Do I deal with mother?”

“I’m leaving her a letter.”

“We shall have a pleasant week-end.” Judy sat up suddenly very straight in her bed. “Look here, Mo, I don’t want to talk to you like mother. I’m not going to try to dissuade you. We’ve got to leave you alone. I see that. I believe in leaving people alone. *Only*—I’ve *seen* Shane—and you haven’t.”

“Well?”

“I haven’t put it strongly enough—what he was like, I mean. He must have been going it for six months—hard. You’re taking on rather a lot, you know, old girl. As long as you realise that. . . . I’m sorry for Shane, of course, but I haven’t any use for him. He’s nothing any longer in my young life. . . . You’ll have a rotten time with him, Mo.”

“I’ll have a rotten time without him, too.”

“You’re beyond me,” said Judy, “Miles and miles. . . . I never *did* see what you got out of it. Shane was always a selfish pig as a husband. But then they all are—and Shane was a likeable enough pig—I’ll say that for him. But he isn’t likeable now, I give you my word. . . .”

“That isn’t the point,”

"Oh, isn't it? Well, you aren't going to pretend that a man who drinks and drugs is going to be easy to live with."

"It isn't something easy I'm looking for."

"I told you a long time ago that you're the sort that puts up with things."

"I feel I've got to put up with this—wherever it leads. After all, I promised. . . . I accepted the Church Service. I needn't have done. Vows count, even to-day."

Judy snorted. "Well, the Church is a lot less particularly honest about it, anyway. The bulk of people *aren't* married in church and don't make any vows, but the Church still thinks they're bound by those other people make. . . . Besides, vows count both ways. Shane broke his. That's what I don't understand. Don't you *mind* what Shane has done? Doesn't it make any difference?"

"A difference, but not *all* the difference. I've come to the conclusion that the disgusting thing about divorce is that it is sought and granted for the wrong thing—for the wrong thing primarily. The sins of the flesh are so much less to me, I suppose, than the sins of the spirit. There *are* things I couldn't have forgiven Shane. Even now, the thing I find it hardest to forgive is the lie—not the thing lied about."

"But that's rather giving the male his head, you know. Grandmother Bentley wouldn't have put it so brutally, but that's what she *meant* when she passed over our revered grandfather's amours. He wouldn't have passed over hers. Men don't."

"Shane did," said Mona quietly.

Judy stared at her.

"What on earth. . . ."

"Didn't you guess?"

"You and Garth, you mean? Good lord, no—why you were engaged—could have got married any odd moment."

"But I didn't *want* to marry Garth. That's why I kept putting him off. I merely wanted *him*—and not for long, and not, even, to the end. You can't marry on that. It goes and there's nothing left. Garth and I had what we wanted of each other. He died before he found out how little it was."

"And you told Shane?"

"I had to."

"But supposing he'd played Hardy's Clare trick?"

"I suppose I knew he wouldn't."

"Couldn't, you mean. Those who live in glass houses. . . . You won't tell mother?"

"I've written it down. It's the only argument she'd understand—that people who live in glass houses. . . ."

"The week-end is certainly going to be strenuous," Judy observed, shaking up her pillows with some violence and settling herself carefully upon them. "I really must get to sleep if I'm to endure it. Good night, old thing."

Mona moved to the door, but paused at Judy's wide-flung window. A silent silvered night, the great watchful moon and the country quiet and grave beneath it. "Nothing here but the moonlight. . . ." Nothing *with* the moonlight. An empty world. She felt lonely in it. She said good night and went to her bed.

Jeremy was not down the next morning when Mona and Judy set off to the station, but when Judy came back there he was with his ebony sticks looking at his lavender-beds.

"Where's your sister, young woman?" he demanded.

"I can't tell you for certain, grandfather, but somewhere between here and Guildford, I should say, at a rough guess."

"Eh, what? I can't hear a word you say. Speak up." Jeremy tapped impatiently with one stick upon the garden path.

"She's gone to town. Gone back to her husband."

"Good for her."

"Good *of* her, you mean."

"I mean what I said, young woman."

"Oh, all right, have it your own way—only mother'll be certain to say it was all your fault."

Jeremy chuckled.

"She always did. Deep down in her heart your mother really believes that I made the world the unsatisfactory place she thinks it is."

Eve arrived, punctual and matter-of-fact as ever. She greeted her father as she had greeted him any time during the last twenty years, with the air of one saying: "Well, you're still here . . ." and she patronised his garden as she had always patronised any garden he had ever had, or that anybody else had ever had, just as she had patronised the countryside all the way down in the train and up from the station.

"Looks very nice, father. Your man's clever."

"Eh, what? Can't hear you."

"Clever—your gardener, I say, clever."

"He does what he's told."

Eve smiled.

"How's Mona?"

"I'm not deaf, you don't have to shout. Mona's very well."

"Where is she?"

"Where she ought to be, with her husband, madam."

"She's gone back?"

Jeremy nodded. The situation, he evidently considered, would have been spoiled by words.

"By this morning's train, mother," said Judy. "She left a letter for you."

But Eve ignored Judy.

"This is *your* doing," she said to Jeremy. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," but Jeremy only shook his head and said, "Eh? What say?" in his most aggravating manner. "I can't hear a word you say when you shout—not a word."

"I'm not shouting," said Eve. "I say this is all your doing—your fault she ever married him—your fault she's gone back."

"It isn't his fault, mother, it's mine. I told Mona what I told you about Shane. I told her, in fact, a lot more. I can't help it, I felt she ought to know. Then late last night she came into my room and said, 'I'm going back,' as though she was saying, 'I'm going to the post.' Come upstairs and I'll give you the letter she left for you."

The letter did nothing for Eve but spoil her lunch. But afterwards she called Judy into her room.

"Have you seen this?"

"No, but I know what's in it."

"Disgraceful," said Eve.

Judy watched her tearing the letter into a thousand pieces.

"Like father, like daughter," she said bitterly.

The colour came up unexpectedly into Judy's face.

"Mother," she said. "How beastly of you!" Then she saw that Eve was crying. "I *told* Mona you'd never understand."

"Understand! I understand very well. I understand that there is no excuse. What excuse can there possibly be? Why should she have done a thing like that?"

"People do—quite nice people. People you'd never imagine. . . . Look at Aunt Beth."

"That was your grandfather's fault. He blocked the path. But nobody was getting in Mona's way."

Judy hardened her heart and took deliberate aim.

"Except you, mother."

"I? Mona's life was her own. All of you have always been given perfect freedom."

"Perfect freedom to be like you—as much like you as possible. You know, mother, you can't bear us to think differently—to be ourselves. And that's the only freedom worth having. Surely you don't believe that Mona's the sort of girl to have affairs of that sort casually? It just means that she hasn't accepted the current standards of morality, sex and all that."

"It means," said Eve, "that she is lacking, quite simply, in what I call character, though you probably think that old-fashioned."

Judy made a little hopeless gesture.

"There you are again. You simply *won't* see—won't *try* to see. I'm not saying that what Mona did was right or wrong—I don't see that it matters *what* we think. But I'm quite sure *she* thought it was right. I mean, in the circumstances, she would have thought it more right than to have married Garth. She knew she wouldn't have stuck to him. You see,

mother, Mona thinks we put too much stress upon the physical. That's why she's gone back to Shane. In a way, I suppose, it's her protest against the physical basis of marriage. I agree with you that she's going to have a rotten time with him, but what's the good of talking? She had to go back. I do see that, anyhow, feeling as she does about it."

"I agree that she had to go back," said Eve, and a little spasm of pain passed over her face. "I think we won't talk about it any more."

Judy rose and went to the door.

"Cheer up, mother," she looked back to say, "we aren't really such a bad lot, but we do want to do our own marketing. I daresay you'd do it for us lots better—only that won't do. We must find out—make our own mistakes. You don't suppose, do you, that Mona hasn't regretted about Garth?"

"I hope so—with all my heart," said Eve.

Outside in the garden Mark sat with his grandfather in the August sunshine. Judy came and sat down between them, lighted a cigarette and said nothing. The talk was of Canada. It continued to be of Canada when Eve appeared, and Judy was lighting her second cigarette.

"What's your mother got to say to all this?" Jeremy asked after a while.

"Mother doesn't mind," said Mark. "In a way, I'll be considering mother if I go."

Eve laughed.

"It's a queer delusion my children suffer from, father—that they study my wishes over things, whereas they study nobody but themselves, ever."

Mark flushed a little.

"But you *don't* mind," he said, and then added, with one of his old disconcerting flashes of insight: "At least you won't mind my going—you won't miss me in the way Aunt Beth misses Harry. What you'll mind is *the reason* for my going. I'm a failure and I'm going to Canada to try my luck. You do mind *that*. If I were being sent out by the firm, to some lucrative post. . . ." Mark laughed.

So did Jeremy.

"On the whole, madam," he said to Eve, "you don't seem to have been much more successful with your children than your mother was with hers, for all your big ideas. . . ."

"Thanks very much," said Judy, "but I intend to be very successful."

"At what?"

"Medicine and surgery."

"Well, that'll please mother," said Mark. "You've saved the situation, Ju. One of us had to be a doctor, anyway. It was written aforetime."

"I'm going to the top of the hill," said Eve, rising from her seat. Nobody offered to accompany her. Three pairs of eyes watched her walk down to the gate past the yew trees and out on to the white road beyond.

"Funny woman, your mother," said Jeremy. "Always knows. . . . Believes in progress and goals."

"Don't you?" said Mark.

"Progress?" said Jeremy. "Bah! Look at that, my lad."

"That" was the morning paper, and the paragraph to which Jeremy pointed was headed:

HORSELESS FARMS:

NOVEL SCHEME TO BE ADOPTED

"Read it out aloud," said Judy.

Mark read:

A proposal is being put forward, and will probably be carried out, that agricultural engineers should hold a large-scale power-farming display in the North some time in October. At this farmers will be shown how it is possible to do almost all their work without horses. Tractors would go into the harvest-field and haul the harvesting equipment, drive the threshes, haul the grain and straw, and then immediately afterwards plough up and cultivate the stubble.

In this way farmers would be shown not only the efficiency of machinery, but how to get weeks ahead of the autumn and winter seasons, with their unsettled weather conditions.

"Progress!" said Jeremy. "Bah!" and spat with precision in the middle of the garden path.

"But you've got to believe we're getting somewhere," said Mark.

"Even if we're not?" Jeremy chuckled hoarsely. "The goal of life, my boy, is death."

"Not at our age," said Judy, "thank you very much. The goal for us is El Dorado. You can't tell us there isn't one—only that you haven't found yours. Well, we're going to find ours—that's the difference. Isn't it, Mark? If you could stop us believing that you'd stop everything. The world might at least be grateful to us for our hopeful impulses. They're the only things that count. . . . Without them there just wouldn't be any world at all." She stood up, stretching her young arms above her head. "I think I'll go and find mother," she said.

They watched her swinging quickly along the old flagged path, through the gate and on along the road. Her young voice floated back to them. "Coo-ee . . . coo-ee. . . ."

Mark, his eyes on his sister, found himself thinking of Greta—of Greta as he had seen her last night, sitting (as she always took care to sit when Mark was about) where the light shone down directly upon her hair. "It's Greta who's going to suffer, not mother," he thought. "But she'd suffer much more if I stayed. We couldn't go on like this for ever." But he was seized with sudden poignant regret because he had not kissed her and because he knew, now, that he never would. At that moment his victory seemed to him a barren affair. He felt as though he had closed the door upon life. Misery, unexpected but terrible, seized him by the throat; he realised with dismay that he was clinging to the thought of Canada as a drowning man clings to spars.

He lighted a cigarette and looked at the old man in his chair, huddled against the wind that was steadily rising. He said suddenly and very loudly, as though he had to convince himself, "Our hopeful impulses. . . . Judy's right. There isn't anything else that matters."

"You're shouting, my boy. I can't hear a word you say

when you shout," said Jeremy, his face creased and crumpled and red with annoyance.

Mark looked at his cigarette, looked at the old man, fidgeted and sat silent for a moment. Then he tried it another way.

"Judy's right," he said. "We've got to go on. After all, if I didn't believe that in Canada. . . ."

The wind sighed in the dark yew trees standing sentinel at the gate; sank and rose again. Beneath its caress the yellow roses on Jeremy's southern wall stirred and lightly shook down a petal or two. From the road Judy's young voice ran back to them, brisk and challenging. "Coo-ee . . . coo-ee. . . ."

July, 1921—January, 1923.

Some Press Opinions of

INTRUSION

BY

THE SAME AUTHOR

" 'Intrusion' is so fine a piece of work, written with such insight into human nature and with so finished a style, that it sets a new standard of comparison."—*Evening Standard*.

" A genuine achievement. A definite and distinguished piece of workmanship. More than that, it is a first-rate story, a study of modern humanity, and especially of modern femininity, keen, eager and penetrating. If only for the sake of the distracting, distressing, devastating character of Roberta, 'Intrusion' would be entitled to rank among the few memorable novels of the year."

Daily Telegraph.

" Conveyed with extraordinary skill. Merely as a study of post-war youth the novel would take a very high place indeed. The actual writing, whether in description or dialogue, is as good as one could desire: clear, simple, flexible, and controlled by the feeling for style, and the rare touches of landscape are exquisite."—*Manchester Guardian*.

" This striking novel will enhance Mrs. Seymour's reputation. Bobbie is a remarkable study, visualized with the penetration of a roentgen ray. Nor is it the only one of the kind in a book with which little fault can be found."

Daily News.

" Uncommonly clever. It is of particular interest that a woman should give us this merciless, inside-out portrait of another woman."—*Star*.

" A brilliant and thoughtful novel, which faces life without sugaring it over with a coating of false hopes or counterfeit of happiness."—*Express*.

"What is so remarkable about this latest work of Beatrice Kean Seymour's is the strength of its characterisation, the even balance of its ideas; and the sincerity and beauty of its expression. . . . The story is full of vitality and should be read by all who appreciate not only the literary touch, but the best in modern fiction."—*Sunday Times*.

"Of our younger novelists, Mrs. Seymour is one of the most broad-minded, and has wide interests. . . . She has a central sanity which prevents her from mistaking the whirlpool for the world. This new novel . . . in spite of certain youthful lapses and an occasional youthful intolerance, is in a good tradition. It reminds one . . . in its quiet and peaceful insistence on the value of normality and reality, of Galsworthy's early work; and is marked by something of the pity which is so conspicuously absent from the fierce and bitter work of many of our younger novelists. 'Intrusion' is a fine novel, boldly planned, and far better written than most modern novels."—*Observer*.

"A book of far more than average interest and cleverness. Mrs. Seymour assuredly has a future."—*Saturday Westminster Gazette*.

"The beautiful, cold, egotistical Roberta is drawn with a relentlessly pointed pen. Becky Sharp stands out no more vividly from the printed page. However, the high value of this novel consists in the superb wording of it."
Country Life.

"The author takes her place in the small company of living novelists whose work makes an addition to literature. Her style, beautifully clear and concise, is nevertheless capable of subtleties that would have driven Henry James down the labyrinthine ways of his own mind. Brilliant, it has nothing of the hardness of the merely brilliant. . . . Mrs. Seymour is in the direct line of descent from Charlotte Bronte."—*Bookman*.

"One can settle down to enjoy Mrs. Seymour's delicate character drawing and sense of real life. For they are the

merits of this long, full, detailed novel. Mrs. Seymour can draw live, natural young women, who see and partake of life, which includes but transcends love . . . they are real and three-dimensional . . . we see them in the flesh."

Rose Macaulay, in *Time and Tide*.

"A very adroit, careful and sympathetic study. As scrupulous and distinguished a piece of work as we expect from the author."—*Nation and Athenæum*.

"A very subtle study of incompatibility. A book of fine shades, fine perceptions, and a fine humour."—*To-day*.

"Mrs. Seymour's 'Intrusion' makes her a fixed star among contemporary writers. She has two great gifts as an author—an avid interest in humanity, and a white glow of creative vision. Her style is distinguished but unforced, and her dialogue has the ease of spontaneous conversation. She possesses a power of construction which would be envied by many of the veterans of fiction, and her psychology is always convincing."—Louis J. McQuilland, in *John O'London's Weekly*.

" . . . The best second novel we recall ever having read. 'Intrusion' will not disappoint, for it is an absorbingly interesting story, and is written with consummate skill. It is as good a story as May Sinclair at her best . . . as good a story as 'The Tree of Heaven,' for example. We could wish that many of our modern novel writers could go to school to Beatrice Kean Seymour, not only for her handling of sex, which is not priggish nor yet offensive, but for her admirably sustained narrative style. The story has some ripe, mellow philosophy, which alone would mark it off from the rawness of many of the current novels. But it is the story that is the thing in 'Intrusion.' The author's art is not marred by propaganda. She tells her story all the time, easily, beautifully, and in dialogue that is as natural and unstrained as ordinary talk."—Mrs. N. P. Dawson, in the *New York Evening Globe*.

"It is not too much to say that 'Intrusion' is enough to place Mrs Seymour well in the front rank of English novelists. It may help to explain her to American readers who have not yet read either story to say that she is comparable to Mrs Wharton, especially in the relentless accuracy of her dissection of feminine character. . . . The book is a gallery of minutely-drawn female portraits, each fully alive, and each carrying entire conviction. It is a brilliant performance"—*New York Herald*.

"'Intrusion' passes far beyond the typical novel with its insistence upon situation and strained characterisation, for it becomes a finely conceived bit of reality. These men and women who move so naturally through the pages of the book are the most living and vital figures that, one might almost say, can be found in this season's fiction. . . . So real are they that one might almost expect to meet them at the next corner. The reader must understand that here is a writer who takes the most loving care in creating her personages and arranging her situations. She has a real story to tell, and she exhausts it in the finest manner. . . . Any lover of genuinely excellent fiction cannot afford to miss reading 'Intrusion' . . . for it quite definitely places Mrs Seymour among those figures of our day who are to be considered in the most serious manner."—*New York Times*.

"Allan's struggle with himself and his adverse fate is a penetrating study. . . . Neither Joseph Hergsheimer nor D. H. Lawrence, with all their expertness in analysing masculine passion, has shown more real understanding or written more convincingly on the subject. As for the feminine character-drawing, Mrs. Seymour shows herself to be a rare combination of psycho-analyst and womanly intuition; while the drive of something at once stirring and ennobling persists through the story."—Cleveland Rodgers, in the *Brooklyn Eagle*.

Some Press Opinions of INVISIBLE TIDES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

"Beatrice Kean Seymour, the author of 'Invisible Tides,' is another star in the literary void. . . . She knows the sorrow of mortality, and she has a careful and elaborate technique through which to express what she feels . . . 'Invisible Tides' is written with unerring taste and sense of proportion: one phase leads on to another until the whole is complete."—*Times Literary Supplement*.

"Mrs. Seymour's book is alive, essentially alive and stirring with emotion, and she writes, we are almost tempted to say, the very best English we have encountered in a new novelist for many seasons. Her literary method is fresh, buoyant, sensitive: she never uses the threadbare epithet or the easy 'reach-me-down' phrase. Mrs. Seymour possesses the sense of character in a quite remarkable degree."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"Probably the best first book of the year. It is so defiant in its modernity that it will rouse antagonisms."—Louis J. McQuilland, in the *Sunday Express*.

"To Mrs. Beatrice Kean Seymour, we think, belongs the distinction of having written in 'Invisible Tides' the best novel of the year. It is already one of the best sellers. It is a long novel, but so amazingly alive and vibrant with impressions of men and things that the reader will turn the last page and lay the book down with regret."—*Daily Sketch*.

"Mrs. Seymour's style is assured, her knowledge of human nature sound, and her characterisation very good indeed."

Pall Mall Gazette.

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